Buddhism in the Modern World

Edited by
David L. McMahan

ROUTLEDGE

Religions in the Modern World

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Buddhism in the Modern World explores the challenges faced by Buddhism today, the distinctive forms that it has taken and the individuals and movements that have shaped it. Part One discusses the modern history of Buddhism in different geographical regions, from Southeast Asia to North America. Part Two examines key themes including globalization, gender issues, and the ways in which Buddhism has confronted modernity, science, popular culture and national politics. Each chapter is written by a distinguished scholar in the field and includes photographs, summaries, discussion points and suggestions for further reading. The book provides a lively and up-to-date overview that will be indispensable for both students and scholars of Buddhism.

David L. McMahan is Professor of Religious Studies at Franklin & Marshall College, USA. He is the author of *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford, 2008) and *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Routledge, 2002).

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Introduction

David L. McMahan

When people living in Los Angeles or London or Sydney with no particular family connection to Buddhism think of this religion, they might think of the Dalai Lama or the aging baby boomer neighbor who meditates on Thursday evenings with a group of friends in a rented meeting room. They may have vague images of stone Buddha statues and robed monks in far-away Asian countries. Some may even be familiar with basic teachings like the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path from a college course in world religions. Few casual observers in the West are aware, however, of the sheer variety of ways of being Buddhist in the modern world. Consider the following images from various parts of the Buddhist world today:

- a solitary Tibetan nun sits for years in a remote cave in the Himalayas doing elaborate and dynamic visualizations of colorful Tantric deities;
- thousands of Burmese monks march *en masse* down the street in Rangoon, begging bowls turned upside-down, a sign of protest against the Burmese military government, from whom they refuse donations;
- Sri Lankan devotees gather by the tens of thousands at a ten-day festival with parading dancers, jugglers, and elephants, all honoring an ancient relic considered to be the Buddha's tooth;
- a Thai woman goes to the local temple, places incense in front of a statue of the Buddha and prays for her son's success in upcoming examinations;
- a multi-ethnic group gathers in a living room in Boston to chant a mantra – *nam myōhō renge kyō* – repeatedly for over an hour non-stop;
- nuns and volunteers at the Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan airlift 5000 blankets made from recycled bottles and thousands of kilograms of rice to Japan after the devastating 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Such images could be multiplied many-fold, and no single book can hope to address comprehensively the wide variety of Buddhist traditions now spanning the globe and expressed in dozens of languages. This volume, however, does gather together representative accounts and analyses of Buddhism in some of its most significant recent and current manifestations. It is designed to introduce readers to some of the distinctive forms that Buddhism has taken in the modern world, the individuals and institutions that have shaped them, the modern history of geographically specific manifestations, and the new issues, questions, and challenges they face. It is meant to be accessible to students, but it also contains original research and new perspectives that will be of interest to scholars as well as practitioners.

Within the first millennium after Gautama Buddha lived in the fifth century BCE, a plethora of different schools of Buddhism emerged, each with its own distinctive philosophical interpretations and practices. A voluminous literature continued to expand, and authors in myriad places represented and shaped the tradition in diverse

ways. Traditions claiming to go back to the Buddha spread from the Buddha's home in northern India, taking root in East Asia, the Himalayas, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia. In each of these places, Buddhist teachings and practices became interfused with indigenous thought and ways of life, creating unique Buddhist cultures. It is only in the past two centuries, in fact, that Buddhists themselves have become aware of so many people in other parts of Asia who also consider themselves followers of the Indian sage. And in the modern period Buddhism has finally spread beyond Asia to Europe and North America, where it flourishes, as well as to Australia, New Zealand, and a number of South American countries. Just as Buddhist traditions centuries ago combined with Daoism, Confucianism, Bön, and popular religions in Asia, they now combine with the indigenous traditions of Western modernity, such as scientific rationalism, Romanticism, Christianity, Judaism, psychology, and pop culture.

In addition to the wide diversity of Buddhism, this volume addresses the changes and adaptations of Buddhism to modernity. Before the modern period, Buddhist traditions already displayed a remarkable adaptability, taking on new forms and blending with indigenous traditions in nearly every part of Asia. During the last century it has become a truly global religion. Some of the greatest transformations of Buddhism have occurred recently due to its encounter with the West. A number of important factors mark this encounter. The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century meetings of Buddhists and Europeans were not always friendly: they were marked by the colonization and subjugation of many Asian countries by European powers and anxiety over European military and economic hegemony among those who were not colonized. Much in the distinctively modern forms of Buddhism began as a response to the negative characterizations of Buddhism by colonists and Christian missionaries, as well as the real loss of power that Buddhist institutions faced in colonized countries. Buddhists in the colonial period often took seriously Western claims that the tradition had declined into superstition and idolatry and reformed Buddhist doctrines, practices, and institutions by selectively adopting elements of Western philosophy, scientific thought, Protestantism, romanticism, and psychology (see chapters by Baumann, McMahan, and Payne). It is in part due to these reforms that Buddhism today enjoys in some circles its reputation as a 'rational religion' largely compatible with modern science. Although the period of European colonialism is over, Buddhism still bears the stamp of these reformulations.

Yet colonialism and its after-effects cannot account for all of the modernizing trends in Buddhism today. Industrialization, globalization, international capitalism, secularism, and the internal and international political dynamics of various nations have had immense impacts on Buddhist individuals and institutions. Conversely, ease of travel (for some), global media, and immigration have spread Buddhism to many different geographical areas, produced new ways of accessing teachings, and even new

ways of being Buddhist. Books written by American Buddhists have been translated into Japanese and used to teach youth in Buddhist schools. Historic Buddhist temples in China have rebounded after decades of suppression and have been made into tourist sites, while prominent Sri Lankan monks have taken up political office. Lay people around the world now have access to meditation practices formerly carried out only by monastics, and the solitary Buddhist in rural Alabama can do an online retreat with recorded talks by well-known teachers. Buddhist-derived meditation practices are now routinely offered to medical and psychiatric patients around the world, and Buddhist non-profit organizations work with communities in developing countries to establish sustainable farming methods or to protest human rights abuses. Today's immense transnational exchange of ideas and information has fostered the introduction of non-Buddhist elements into the Buddhist traditions, while bits of Buddhist doctrine and practice make their way into Christianity, Judaism, and secular cultures. All of these are unprecedented activities that could hardly have been anticipated by Buddhists of earlier times.

Since this book takes up Buddhism within only the last 150 years or so, it will help if the reader already knows something of basic Buddhist ideas and practices, but it is the implicit contention of this work that simply knowing these things in the abstract is not enough. Indeed, many of the chapters demonstrate something that, given the way Buddhism is often represented in the West, may not be evident to lay people or students: that Buddhism is always deeply embedded in and structured by local social practices, institutions, economics, and political affairs. Despite its ascetic origins, Buddhism has never floated freely above worldly concerns. While it is often depicted in the West as a solitary, contemplative tradition, we cannot understand Buddhism in the modern world without understanding its place in the historical, social, and political realities of the particular places in which it is found, as well as in this particular historical age of global capitalism, transnational communication, and international interdependence.

This volume not only details various forms of Buddhism in the modern world, it also demonstrates a variety of scholarly approaches to the analysis of Buddhism. All of the essays employ the historical-critical methods of the discipline of Religious Studies, but within that broad orientation different authors have divergent methodological and theoretical approaches. We have not striven for uniformity, and indeed some authors may well be at odds with each other. For example, Sallie B. King's account of the sources and meanings of Socially Engaged Buddhism – recent movements that emphasize 'engaging in a nonviolent way on a popular, and often mass, level with the social, political, economic and/or environmental issues' (King's essay) – disagrees in many respects with Damien Keown's account. I view such disagreements as teachable tensions and have not asked authors to smooth them over to present a monolithic interpretation. Some chapters are incisive critiques not only of received images

of Buddhism but in some respects of certain features of modern Buddhism itself. Richard Payne's essay, for example, critiques the attempts of Buddhists and Buddhist sympathizers to see Buddhism as a 'set of tools and techniques that we can put to use reducing stress and creating happiness.' This, he claims, distorts Buddhism by viewing it only through the lens of contemporary western psychological categories. Others, such as Francisca Cho, cautiously applaud distinctively modern trends, in this case the contemporary conversation between Buddhism and science. Others attempt a more phenomenological analysis, laying out fascinating details of, for instance, the recent history of feminist trends in Buddhism (Wilson) and representations of Buddhists and Buddhism in media and popular culture (Mitchell).

The first section of this volume offers overviews of modern history and contemporary issues involving Buddhism in particular geographical areas. Given the numerous places in the world where Buddhists live, it is illustrative rather than comprehensive, attempting to give accounts of Buddhist life and recent history of Buddhism in places where the tradition is especially prominent or where new forms of Buddhism have emerged. The second section takes up thematic issues that often cut across different schools and regions. This includes addressing Buddhists' interactions with science, political realities, media and popular culture, globalization, gender issues, and ethical questions. We hope that together these chapters will provide a new and fascinating portrait of a millenniums-old religious tradition as it finds and creates various places for itself in an increasingly complex world.

Part one

Buddhism in its Geographical Contexts

1 Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Southeast Asia

Juliane Schober

Introduction

Contemporary forms of Buddhist modernity in Southeast Asia are inflected in ways that are specific to the historical and cultural contexts from which they emerged, preempting any attempt to describe modern Buddhist practices in this region in general and comprehensive ways.[1] This is due to the cultural diversity within the region and the different ways in which Buddhist traditions have been appropriated and mediated by local cultures and vernacular languages. It is also the result of the fragmented social and intellectual condition of modernity which, as Theodore Adorno (2005: 218) reminds us, 'is a qualitative, not a chronological category.' Thus, this essay can only provide a partial commentary on selective attitudes, habits, and practices as they are articulated in modern Buddhist reforms, institutions, roles and in the interactions of modern Buddhists with economic, social, and political patterns of circulation.

Southeast Asia is a region known for its religious and cultural diversity. It is home to Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist traditions that developed over the course of centuries. Buddhist monks, texts and practices migrated to Southeast Asia from India, Sri Lanka, central Asia and China by land and sea routes. Buddhist civilizations began to flourish there as early as the second century CE, as indicated in the archeological record of a Mahāyāna center near present-day Hanoi, Vietnam. The earliest inscriptions that indicate the presence of a Pāli Buddhist tradition in Southeast Asia date to the fifth to seventh centuries CE in the kingdom of Śrīkṣetra near Prome in lower Burma, and to the sixth to eighth centuries in the ancient kingdom of Dvāravatī located in the lower Chao Phraya River basin in Thailand (Skilling 1997: 94). Buddhist practices profoundly shaped the history, cultures and institutions in those regions of mainland Southeast Asia that today make up the countries of Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. In contemporary Vietnam, most people practice some form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, while Theravāda Buddhism is the dominant religion of Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.

Historians point to multiple locations from which a Theravāda tradition emerged in Southeast Asia. Over the course of more than a millennium, the *Pāli Imaginaire* (Collins 1998) shaped many Buddhist civilizations in the region, informed monastic lineages, and inspired the construction of grand monuments. Integrated into a regional network of trade routes, traditional courts functioned as civilizational centers that cultivated an intellectual elite of monks (*saṅgha*) engaged in the production, proliferation and transmission of Buddhist texts. The patronage of the Buddhist court over the *saṅgha* supported the production of knowledge repertoires in the *Pāli Imaginaire.* While the textual tradition of Theravāda Buddhism proclaims that its sacred texts contain only the pristine teachings of the Buddha, studies in history and anthropology have shown that this religion encompasses notable diversity in the disciplined practices of monastic lineages and their lay supporters as well as in texts transmitted in Pāli and

in vernacular languages (Collins 1990). This diversity is amplified by the presence of non-Theravādin traditions in the region. François Bizot (1992) and more recently Kate Crosby (2000, 2009) have underscored the pervasive presence of Tantric Buddhist texts in the region, many of which were composed in Pāli. Furthermore, we know that Sanskrit Buddhist texts had reached the Mon and Bagan kingdoms by the middle of the first millennium.

Buddhist courts acted as pivotal nodes in an extensive network of ritual exchange and thus could exert some hegemonic influence on the formation of Theravāda insitutions and disciplined practices. Emulating a ritual model of Buddhist kingship attributed to the Mauryan emperor Aśoka (304–232 BCE), Buddhist kings in southeast Asia extended their ritual and material patronage to selected monastic lineages. This system of ritual exchange and reciprocal legitimation shaped preferential relations between the court and some monastic insitutions. For lay people, this economy of merit determined one's social rank and proximity to the Buddhist court, while validating the religious achievements of monks and their proximity to transcendence (*nibbāna*). The Buddhist court perpetuated this ritual economy of merit through donations to the *saṅgha* and through the construction of large-scale religious monuments such as those in Bagan, Dvāravatī, and Ayuttiya. These traditional kingdoms functioned as regional centers or, in the words of the eminent anthropologist of Buddhism, Stanley J. Tambiah, as galactic polities that rose to and eventually faded from power due to the expansion of competing kingdoms (Tambiah 1975). Traditional mainland Southeast Asia was thus a region with multiple civilizational centers located in fertile river valleys and sustained by wet rice agriculture. Neighboring tribal groups generally were vassals who maintained fluctuating allegiances with these Buddhist courts in order to gain access to their power and prestige and emulate their ritual practices (Lieberman 2003). Thus, long before its encounter with modernity, local Buddhist forms in mainland Southeast Asia comprised heterogeneous institutions and practices that developed through multiple lineages of monastic transmission of the *dhamma* across Asia.

The emergence of Buddhist modernity in colonial contexts

For most people in Southeast Asia, contact with modern practices, institutions, and worldviews developed in the course of European colonization. Portuguese, Dutch, French, British and Japanese colonial regimes in the region initiated enduring cultural changes that eventually contributed to a crisis of religious authority and profoundly re-shaped modern Buddhist practices and institutions. Portuguese explorers were the earliest Europeans to settle in port cities along the coastlines of Southeast Asia in the sixteenth century. In response to the encroaching presence of European powers along the coast regions of the Andaman Sea, the Burmese reoriented their polity toward

inland trade and relocated their capital upcountry to Ava in 1635. Two centuries later, the British colonized Myanmar in the course of three Anglo-Burmese wars between 1824 and 1886 and retained control until the country gained independence in 1948. France, the other European power on the southeast Asian mainland, gradually colonized Cambodia (Edwards 2007) after 1863 and, over the next three decades, absorbed all of French Indochina (roughly encompassing Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam). While Thailand was not under direct colonial rule, it was forced to make some territorial concessions to Britain and France under Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910). Historians (Winichakul 1994, Loos 2006) conclude that modern Thai religion, culture, and history were deeply affected by the effects of colonization in the region that resulted in sweeping economic, political, and social changes.

Colonial rule in Southeast Asia reshaped Buddhist communities and practices and precipitated a gradual erosion of traditional values and the fragmentation of traditional institutions. The British conquest of the Konbaun court marked the collapse of traditional Buddhist kingship and the decline of cultural values and lifeways in Upper Burma. The colonizers transformed Mandalay Palace into Fort Dufferin, exiled King Thibaw (1878–86), and moved the polity's cosmic center, the Lion Throne, from Mandalay to Rangoon and eventually to Calcutta (Mendelson 1975). While the *saṅgha* was the only traditional institution to survive Burma's colonial transformations, its organization and cultural relevance were greatly diminished. The collapse of traditional institutions hastened the restructuring of traditional society through colonial forms of knowledge and classification (Cohn 1996). The gradual decline of monastic institutions precipitated a Buddhist crisis of authority (Keyes *et al.* 1994) in Southeast Asia.

The French sociologist and anthropologist Bruno Latour (1993: 10, 11) proposes that the work of modernity proceeds through translation and purification. While translation allows for the creation of hybrid cultural forms, purification divides humans and things into separate ontological zones in order to define modern human agency. In the course of Buddhist reforms during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, the work of purification constituted an internal response to a growing colonial presence in Southeast Asia. Modernizing Buddhist reforms were initiated in the Buddhist polities of Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia by Buddhist kings (*dhammarāja*) who governed in accordance with the ten rules of good governance (*desa rāja*) and the Universal Buddhist Law (*dhamma*). While these reforms affected many areas of life within the Buddhist polity, they were conducted within a Buddhist worldview and ideology, and Buddhist practices and institutions became eventually themselves the object of rationalizing and centralizing reforms.

The reforms centralized the administration of the *saṅgha* through a bureaucratic hierarchy and sought to standardize monastic education, texts, and disciplined behavior. They demythologized traditional cosmological forms of Buddhist practice,

but continued to embrace the ritual patterns of exchange based on an economy of merit. They laid the foundation for those forms of Buddhist practice that scholars characterized as 'state Buddhism' (Swearer 2009), those forms of Buddhist practice sanctioned by the state and the institutions it supports.

In contrast to its neighbors to the east and west, modernizing reforms during the reign of Thai King Rama I (r. 1782–1809) were instituted much earlier than similar reforms elsewhere in the region. These reforms continued under Rama IV (Mongkut, r. 1851–68) and Rama V (Chulalongkorn, r. 1868–1910) and centralized the administration of the polity and of the Buddhist *saṅgha*. After ascending the throne, King Mongkut favored the reformist and discipline-oriented Thammayut lineage he had founded during his years as an ordained monk. Mongkut's support closely allied this lineage with the court, and Thammayut monks were instrumental in implementing his reforms. By the time the Burmese King Mindon (r. 1853–78) convened the Fifth Buddhist Council (1868–71) to revitalize Buddhism and shore up its institutions, British colonization of Lower Burma had already been under way for more than half a century. Several reformist *vinaya*-oriented lineages emerged during this time. In particular, Shwegyin monks distinguished themselves through their emphasis on disciplined practice and they continue to be viewed as an elite monastic group in contemporary Burma. In Cambodia, initial attempts to reform the *saṅgha* commenced under King Ang Duong (r. 1841–4 and 1845–60), who had been installed by the Thai (Hansen 2007, Harris 2005). These efforts, which continued during the French administration of 'Cambodge,' sought to purify texts, ethical conduct and teachings (*sāsana*) (Edwards 2007). The Khmer response to colonial modernity exemplified a general desire among Buddhist monks and lay people to reinterpret Buddhist teachings and rules for ethical practice in light of a rapidly changing experience.

The emphasis on disciplined monastic behavior as a pure source of merit for lay people was a pressing concern of the Buddhist reforms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the process, the Thai reformist Thammayut monks distinguished themselves from the monastic majority of Mahānikāy whose practice was generally considered more lax. Similar distinctions formed in Burma between the reformist Shwegyin and the majority of Thudhamma monks, and in Cambodia, between reformist Dhammakāy and Mahānikāy monks. While they reconstituted the purity of Buddhist practice, free from the corruptions of the modern age, they also reaffirmed a ritual separation between ordained monks and their lay supporters, whose primary religious activity was still defined in terms of making merit through donations.

Concurrent with these reform efforts focused on monastic discipline, a new awareness of belonging to the larger Theravāda tradition emerged in response to colonial interventions and against the background of modernizing reforms through which monastic lineages reinterpreted disciplined practices, texts, and teachings. In

the Burmese discourse on religion, a rhetorical shift occurred in the understanding of religion as *thathāna*, the Buddhist dispensation, to Theravāda, the Teachings of the Elders (Kirichenko 2009). This modern transformation of Buddhist self-awareness is also reflected in Todd Perreira's (2011) observation that the term 'Theravāda' first appeared in the western literature in 1836. The development of a modern, trans-regional identity of Theravāda Buddhism as focused on the practice of monastic discipline is also accompanied by the fragmentation of monastic lineages and a decline of monastic authority that accompanied the formation of Buddhist identity in the face of colonial modernity.

During the nineteenth century, European scholars also reconfigured their conception of the Orient as the 'mystic East' (King 1999). They invented Buddhism as a world religion, as Philip Almond (1988) and Tomoko Masuzawa (2005) argue, by collecting, classifying, translating, and archiving Buddhist texts. A significant part of this project was undertaken by the German philologist Max Müller (1823–1900), who founded Indology as an academic discipline in the West, and by Thomas W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) who taught Pāli at the University of London and founded the Pāli Text Society in 1881. Rhys Davids was especially keen to reconstruct the historical biography of the Buddha and, assisted by his conversations with Theravādin monks in Sri Lanka, sought to recover the pristine teachings of the Buddha from the accretions acquired in the course of history. Colonial scholars in Southeast Asia, including Paul Bigandet (1813–94), Vicar Apostolic of Ava and Pegu, Burma, and Adhémard Leclère (1853–1917), an administrator in the French Protectorate of Cambodia, who worked 'to retrieve and reorganize' the tradition of the Buddha (Hallisey, 1995: 52). Charles Hallisey underscores the importance of mimesis in the production of meaning in local contexts where the colonial effort to translate proved inadequate. Colonial scholarship in Southeast Asia constructed a rationalized vision of Buddhist teachings that not only laid the foundations for modern Buddhist studies, but also created canons of knowledge in western scholarship regarding what was to be considered 'Theravādin' or 'Buddhist' in Buddhist Southeast Asia.

Through the introduction of colonial forms of knowledge and print media, western knowledge became a venue for access to social and economic advancement and furthered the formation of an indigenous, colonial middle class and a new awareness of being a colonial subject. Colonial power facilitated a secular access to wealth and prestige that until then had not been a conceptual possibility in the Buddhist cultures of Southeast Asia, which became increasingly concerned with questions of identity, education, and a national language. Perhaps unintentionally, colonial policy also opened up new spaces from which modern Buddhist practices materialized. For instance, the British allowed public gatherings only for religious purposes, which made the Buddhist domain an obvious refuge for nationalist voices in Burma. In this complex matrix, Buddhist voices converged to engage and also to challenge colonial modernity.

The Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) illustrates modern Buddhist practices under colonialism. It was founded in Rangoon in 1906 by lay people who sought to promote a modern Burmese national identity, western education, and Buddhist modernism. The YMBA was modeled after the educational mission of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and emulated its use of print media in organizing grassroots movements. It promoted the idea of 'the modern Burman' and popularized this new national identity within an emerging middle class that was modern, Burmese and Buddhist. 'To be Burmese is to be Buddhist' was a slogan coined by the YMBA and reinterpreted later by Burma's post-independence Prime Minister, U Nu, and others since then. Calls to mobilize Buddhist sentiments in the formation of national identity, modern culture, and language similarly reconfigured Buddhist institutions and practices in Southeast Asia.

Trends that dramatically reconfigured modern Buddhist practices in Southeast Asia include the gradual decline of monastic authority and the concurrent rise of lay authority; the proliferation of new types of ascetic roles that fostered the involvement of women in enlightenment practices; and the popular rise of meditational practice, previously the spiritual prerogative of monks. Many Buddhists expressed disenchantment with the ethical practices they witnessed and interpreted as signs of moral decline in the modern age. The modernist Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923) first advocated *vipassanā* meditation among lay people in the early twentieth century (Braun 2008) as a way to strengthen Buddhist practice in colonial Burma. This allowed for lay people to lay claim to achieving higher path stages (*jhāna*) and thus greater religious authority. Some lay people became prominent lay meditation teachers, such as Burmese U Ba Hkin, an accountant and cabinet member of the U Nu government who founded the earliest international meditation centers (Houtman 1990). Ingrid Jordt (2007 documents how the network of Mahasi *vipassanā* centers created a lay meditation movement that commenced during the U Nu period and continues to be vitally important among all segments of contemporary Burmese society. In Thailand, the disciplines of Achan Man, the founder of the forest tradition in northeast Thailand, also promoted *vipassanā* meditation. By the turn of the twenty-first century, this form of modern meditation was popular among western Buddhists who either traveled to meditation centers in Southeast Asia or appropriated it in a form that was largely disembodied from the context of the tradition (Schedneck 2009).

The unprecedented rise in lay meditation encouraged new forms of ascetic practice and social roles for spiritual leadership. Lay meditation also encouraged new identities for Buddhist women as accomplished meditators, ascetic renouncers, and increasingly also as scholars of Pāli (Collins and McDaniel 2010, Cook 2010). The practice of meditation among women further gave rise to a growing recognition of the institutions of female renunciants (*sila shin* in Burmese, *mae chi* in Thai), the emergence of charismatic female ascetics, public support for the full ordination of

Theravāda nuns (*bhikkhunī*) and re-establishment of lineages for women monastics that had not existed for more than a millennium (Seeger 2009).

Initiatives to revive the social relevance of Buddhist engagement with the spiritual and material needs of modern society have coalesced under the ecumenical movement of Socially Engaged Buddhism that was inspired by both Mahāyāna and Theravāda sources. Sulak Sivaraksa is a well-known Thai proponent of Socially Engaged Buddhism who emphasizes that Buddhist engagement with society must respond to local needs. Sulak's initiatives represent a translation into popular culture of the philosophical work undertaken by the Thai monk Buddhadasa (1906–93) on 'dhammic socialism' as an intervention against modern social and ethical ills. In his writings, Buddhadasa formulated a Theravādin interpretation of social action that approximated the Mahāyāna ideal of a bodhisattva's compassion for the Buddhist community. The Vietnamese monk Thích Nhât Hanh has upheld the bodhisattva model as a path for Buddhist monks to be engaged with the world. The movement has taken many forms ranging from healthcare delivery to public works and development. It has created modern modes of Buddhist agency in society and advocated a Buddhist interpretation of social justice and human rights and an economy of sufficiency (Swearer 2009).

In addition to the emergence of modern Buddhist institutions and social roles, Buddhist worldviews and ethics were in competition with and inflected by political and social ideologies such as nationalism, militarism, democracy, socialism, communism, secularism, and human rights. Buddhist responses to these modern ideologies are reflected in larger social and political configurations, including in the demands of the nation state, which in some cases were in direct conflict with modern Buddhist practices.

Some of these encounters have been detrimental to Buddhism, such as the violent eradication of the Buddhist *saṅgha* and its textual traditions under the Khmer Rouge (1975–9) in Cambodia. Efforts to re-establish monasteries, temples and institutions of learning began in the 1980s and produced a variety of new religious movements in Cambodia (Marston and Guthrie 2004). In Vietnam, members of the *saṅgha* intervened in the politics of the state by protesting the social conditions and the Indochinese Wars that had been injurious to Buddhist institutions and practices. The self-immolation of the Mahāyāna monk Thích Quảng Đức in 1963 constituted at once an act of protest against the Diem government's treatment of its majority Buddhist population, an act of devotion to the Buddha as described in the Lotus Sutra, and a modern media event that saw images of the burning monk circulating across foreign media outlets.

In the intersection of modern Buddhism and the powers of the state, genealogies of Buddhist resistance against the state as well as Buddhist alliances with modern states have been identified in Thailand (McDaniel 2006) and Burma (Schober 2006, 2011). At certain moments, states have also intervened against charismatic individuals or popular movements that threaten to undermine the authority of the state.



Figure 1.1 Buddhist monks sit in a Vung Tau street during a protest against the South Vietnamese government and the United States during the Vietnam War (May 1966)

Buddhist practices and habits then become a rallying point for resistance against and contestation of the modern state. The so-called Saffron Revolution refers to what Burmese call the events of September 2007 which, among other things, served as a compelling illustration of Buddhist challenges to secular authority, reiterating a long-established discourse on the political influence of monks.

Genealogies of resistance: the Saffron Revolution and the discourse on political monks

In September of 2007, hundreds of thousands of monks throughout Myanmar marched in defiance of military rule and to protest economic policies. In this struggle, the *saṅgha* claimed the moral authority to intervene in the affairs of the state on behalf of their lay supporters and their economic plight. Although the secular state asserted its power over the moral claims of the *saṅgha*, competing moral visions for the nation's future became evident in this conflict.

The public protests of the Saffron Revolution evoked salient symbols of traditional Buddhist practice. Fueled by the mistreatment of monks in the provincial monastic



Figure 1.2 Buddhist monks marching in protest in Yangon, Myanmar (September 2007)

center of Pakokku, the organization that emerged to lead the protests, the Alliance of All Burma Monks, ordered a nationwide strike by invoking monastic law (*pattam nikkujjana kamma)* which empowers monks to refuse donations from unworthy donors.[2] 'Turning over one's alms bowl' (*dhăbei' hmau'*) is the Burmese idiom designating the monks' refusal to accept donations. It constitutes a reversal of traditional ritual patterns of exchange between the *saṅgha* and its lay supporters through which Theravāda hegemony is constituted. This refusal denies the religious, social and political legitimacy of the lay supporter and is tantamount to excommunication from the Buddhist community for those donors who acted to the detriment of the Buddhist dispensation. The monks imposed this boycott on the military government and demanded an apology to remedy the government's misconduct, while continuing to accept food and water from pro-democracy activists. When their ultimatum passed unheeded, the tension generated by Buddhist institutions and practices as sites of protest against the regime was palpable. The practice of *thāthana* had been transformed into a public discourse of protest contesting a military regime.

While many saw this ultimatum as the core of the confrontation between the *saṅgha* and the state, other aspects of the uprising also embodied ritualized patterns that drew on a long genealogy of Buddhist protests. The rallies retraced routes of past protests that connected sacred sites like Shwedagon and Sule Pagoda in Yangon. The images of members of the *saṅgha* walking in single file through the monsoon-drenched streets of Yangon while flanked by lay supporters forming a human chain around them were broadcast by international media and stunned observers worldwide. Mobilizing nationwide marches, the monks chanted that they would protest until they were able to 'bring down the evil government.' Monks also chanted the *metta sutta*, emblematic of loving kindness and compassion, which in this context came to be interpreted as an invocation of Buddhist social engagement, human rights, and democracy. A pivotal moment in the protest occurred when a group of monks took an unexpected turn onto University Avenue in Yangon where soldiers at a checkpoint allowed them to proceed to the home of Aung San Suu Kyi. Emerging in public view for the first time in years, the symbol of Myanmar's democratic movement came to the gate of her compound where she briefly conversed with the monks.

The daughter of the nation's founder of the armed forces and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi has endured many years of house arrest in her struggle for democracy. Although her party, the National League for Democracy, won national elections in 1990, the regime in power preempted her from taking office. She shares with other socially engaged Buddhists the premise that Buddhism can be a moral force in social life. She foregrounds human rights and social justice and opposes oppression and coercion. In her view, government has a moral obligation to ameliorate social, economic, and political injustice and provide for social needs in health care, education, and human rights.

Armed military and police reprisals on the demonstrators silenced public opposition to the regime on September 26 and 27, 2007. Thousands were arrested and perhaps as many as 200 people were killed, including one Japanese journalist. In major cities a curfew was imposed and in Yangon police trucks announced over loudspeakers that 'We have your pictures and we will come to arrest you.' The New Light of Myanmar, a government-run English-language newspaper, predicted that 'national traitors will soon meet their tragic ends.' As the events of September 2007 gave way to the subjugation of the monks and their moral objections to the policies of the secular state, they also revealed fragmentation within the *saṅgha*. The regime pressured the state-sponsored Sangha Mahānayaka Committee to stop the marches, but the authority of senior monks was confounded by local abbots, young monks at monastic universities, and others involved in social welfare projects. Even elite monasteries became sites of resistance and targets of the regime's nightly raids. An unknown number of monks were arrested and disrobed in makeshift prisons. The New Light of Myanmar, a state-censured national daily, reported that monks were defrocked during interrogation and then were re-ordained and sent back to their monasteries. There were also rumors of imprisoned monks on hunger strikes. Their captors reportedly responded to these acts of defiance with the threat, 'we will beat you until you eat.' Such reports incensed many people. The regime's disrespect for monastic authority in a country where monks are not subject to the secular power of the state evoked the martyrdom of U Wisara (1895–1930), a monk who is revered as a national martyr in Myanmar. He protested the treatment monks received in prison under colonial rule, where he died after a prolonged hunger strike. As the 2007 uprising was put down, another generation of displaced and disillusioned young leaders was created among monks and their lay supporters.

The immediacy of digital media was an important factor in the unfolding of the conflict, and allowed citizen reporters who carried CNN-I-Report posters in defiance of state censorship to reach international media, audiences and diaspora groups. Protesters as well as agents of the regime used cell phones as tools in the conflict, either to elude capture or to identify protestors. As the crackdown began, the country's internet servers went offline, leaving foreign embassies as the sole means of communication with the world outside Myanmar. Burmese diaspora communities around the world and Buddhist leaders spoke out against the brutality of the reprisals. The Vietnamese monk Thích Nhât Hanh, known for his commitment to Socially Engaged Buddhism, remarked that the suffering of Burmese monks already accomplished its purpose. His statement alluded to the Mahāyāna ideal of a bodhisattva's compassionate self-sacrifice for the greater good of the Buddhist community. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama commented that the beating of monks would cause bad karma for the perpetrators. Despite the international outcry, the regime's ability to supply national gas to the global economy dissuaded nations in the region from intervening on behalf of the protesters. Soon, the

International Herald Tribute concluded that 'Burmese monks [had been] shown the limits of their moral authority' (Choe Sang-Hun 2007).

Some observers maintained that the *saṅgha*'s public stance on behalf of the plight of their disenfranchised lay supporters during the Saffron Revolution constitutes a form of Buddhist social engagement. The moral thrust of the *saṅgha*'s protest against economic policies rested on two sources of authority, the traditional principles of Buddhist governance that warn against the failure of a Buddhist king (*dhammarāja*) to provide prosperity for his subjects, and the interoperation of monastic discipline (*vinaya*). Since colonial times, the term 'political monks' has been used to describe the public activism and social engagement of monks. As modern Buddhist practices are not confined to the private domain of civil society and retain the potential for political transformations, religious and political values have been simultaneously expressed in discourse on the social engagement of monks. Monks are educated to reflect upon the workings of samsāra. Having made the choice of a monastic vocation, many of these young monks are keenly aware of the challenges facing Myanmar in the future. Some stress that, in contrast to their married cohorts who struggle to support families, monks are free to resist the regime and fight for justice. Some have cautioned that the scholarly project must be attuned to such hegemonic inflections and chronicle the diversity of ways in which Buddhist monks and their lay supporters engage the modern world in religious and political contexts.

Genealogies of alliance: commodification of Buddhism in global contexts

Modern states in Southeast Asia have also sought to infuse political ideologies with Buddhist meaning in order to locate the power of the secular state within a Buddhist framework. Such efforts indicate the state's appropriation of Buddhist authority in order to promote projects of the nation-state such as rural development, the integration of tribal minorities, education, civil society, and so on. During the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, the modern Thai state appropriated the authority and respect that Buddhist monks enjoyed among rural populations to educate the public about development projects, including irrigation and public health programs. The Thai state's use of monastic authority to promote development also encouraged monastic resistance to these projects voiced by socially engaged ecology monks (Darlington 2003). In addition, governments guided by political ideologies from democracy to communism have exerted control over the *saṅgha* in order to enhance the state's legitimacy among citizens. In the 1990s, the Burmese State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) sponsored large-scale rituals as part of the extended pilgrimage of the Chinese Tooth Relic that promoted Buddhist nationalism in the absence of a national constitution (Schober 1997). Taking as its historical precedent the modernizing

reforms of the nineteenth century that were initiated by Buddhists kings in Thailand, Burma, and Cambodia, modern states in Southeast Asia have used their ministries of religious affairs to administer and monitor the activities of religious organizations.

In his study on the modern projects of translation and purification, Latour (1993) reminds us that modern purification never succeeds completely, as new objects imbued with power emerge in the circulation of people and things. Modern Buddhist practices have intersected with global economic flows, social sentiments and the consumer values of an urban middle class to create a plethora of hybrid Buddhist communities. In Thailand, the *saṅgha* hierarchy has been fragmented and its authority compromised by scandals and 'moral decline' that undermined public respect for 'state Buddhism.' In response to the failure of 'state Buddhism' to remain socially relevant, several new movements and cults developed. These new Buddhist communities participate actively in the global and local circulation of hybrid teachings, in the commodification of icons, and in propagating the charisma of religious figures that stand apart from 'state Buddhist' institutions.

In contemporary Buddhist Southeast Asia, the commodification of Buddhist practices and fetishization of sacred objects figure importantly in the creation of modern, hybrid ritual communities that typically form around a charismatic individual. Modern patterns of Buddhist consumption characterize several kinds of modern Buddhist movements in Thailand. They speak to the commercial mentality and social needs for a community of like-minded fictive kin among an urban middle class whose merit-making activities are structured by capitalist principles (Taylor 2008). If, Arjun Appadurai argues (1996: 17), 'the genealogy of cultural forms is about their circulation across regions, the history of these forms is about their ongoing domestication into local practice.' Thai elites succeeded in appropriating the charisma of Achan Man and his forest monks from the northeastern frontier of the nation through the objectification of charisma in amulets (Tambiah 1984, Taylor 1993). The circulation of amulets among modern Thai Buddhists seeking privileged access to transcendent powers further reveals the processes at work in the commodification of sacred icons (Kitiarsa 2007: 89–119). As James Taylor has shown in his excellent study (2008), the Thammakay organization has been especially successful in capitalizing on the malaise of a late-capitalist Thai society. This Buddhist mega-community has implemented totalizing and evangelizing strategies combining a new Buddhist message of embodied Buddha-nature in its followers and the immediacy of transcendence with the use of modern mass media such as the Dhammakay Media Channel (DMC TV), highly diversified investment and targeted marketing strategies to promise 'social harmony' and 'world peace' for its Sino-Thai urban, commercial and professional supporters. The organization facilitates temporary ordination in annual mass rituals for its supporters and constructed a large-scale monument, the Mahadhammakai Cetiya, that concretizes and fetishizes its vision of absolute

Buddhist truth (Taylor 2008: 52–63). This organization represents a highly successful intervention among many other modern Buddhist communities that came to occupy new religious spaces in the aftermath of the declining appeal of traditional Thai *saṅgha* practices.

The circulation of charismatic personages in the negotiation of global and local modern Buddhist practices is also visible in the biography of the Vietnamese Zen monk, Thích Nhât Hanh (1926–) whose life, like many of his generation, was shaped by colonial conditions, war, exile, and an eventual return home. He was fully ordained in 1949 and soon became a social activist and intellectual figure. In the early 1960s, when the United States was at war with Vietnam, he lectured at American universities. His advocacy for peace expressed in a letter to Martin Luther King led to his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. Being denied permission to return to Vietnam after his participation in the 1973 Paris Peace Talks between the United States and Vietnam, Thích Nhât Hanh founded a meditation retreat, Plum Village in southern France. From there, he successfully propagated a modern form of Zen meditation through communication media, meditation retreats, and numerous publications aimed at western audiences. In 2005 and again in 2007 he was invited to return to Vietnam. Although he was criticized by the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), an anti-government organization founded in Vietnam in 1964, for accepting the state's invitation to return from exile, Thích Nhât Hanh used his pilgrimage home to advocate conflict resolution between generations divided by the war and between the homeland and its diaspora communities abroad. In Vietnam where economic reforms (*doi moi*) had liberalized the public square to some extent, his triumphant return signaled two complementary developments, namely the government's receptivity to embrace Thích Nhât Hanh's charisma in the west, and its willingness to organize large-scale Buddhist sermons for the purpose of furthering intergenerational dialogue and fostering a unified national community (Chapman 2007). Modern Buddhist communities that form around a charismatic individual sometimes elude regulation by state agents, especially when they have connections to diasporas and other communities in the West. This, in part, has also motivated the prolific efforts by Buddhist lineages in Southeast Asia to spread the teachings among western Buddhists and the growing popularity of *vipassanā* meditation among travelers in the orbit of religious tourism in Southeast Asia.

Emergent forms of Buddhist modernity in Southeast Asia not only constitute new discursive domains, but also create new hybrid structures that circulate Buddhist individuals, things, and texts globally, locally, and virtually. In the course of their domestication, these new Buddhist hybrid forms articulate fluctuating sentiments and practices and give voice to values that are at once religious and political. Underlying all of these modern Buddhist practices is an ongoing concern about an ultimate order of things that gainsays an inevitable secularization of modern society. Modern

Buddhist conjunctures illustrate how Buddhist practices continue to empower the imagination of political futures in Southeast Asia (Hefner 2010, Schober 2011).

Summary

- Southeast Asia is a region with many religious traditions. Buddhism has played an important role in shaping the early civilizations in the region.
- In precolonial Buddhist polities in Southeast Asia, Buddhist institutions and practices have had close ties to the royal courts. Centralizing and rationalizing reforms of government and religious institutions were undertaken to cope with the encroaching European presence in the region.
- Colonialism influenced the emergence of modern Buddhist practices and institutions. In the modern era, lay people assumed greater religious authority and became increasingly involved in meditation. Gender roles in Buddhist practice began to adapt to the new contexts, such as the growing presence of and respect for ascetic orders for women.
- Contemporary Buddhism has been inflected by modern social and political ideologies, including democracy, human rights, ecology, socialism, communism, secularism, etc. Buddhist syntheses with these modern systems of thought have been articulated in genealogies of Buddhist resistance to state power and in the state's appropriation of Buddhist sources of authority.
- Contemporary forms of Buddhist modernity in Southeast Asia are inflected in ways that are specific to the historical and cultural contexts from which they emerged. In global contexts, the commodification of Buddhist practices and sacred objects has created hybrid practices and new cultic communities, often centered on charismatic teachers.

Discussion points

- What were the reasons Buddhist kings in Burma and Thailand undertook extensive modernizing reforms? How did these reforms affect Buddhist practices?
- Describe some characteristically modern Buddhist practices in Southeast Asia. How are they different from traditional Buddhist practices?
- How did colonialism intervene in traditional Buddhist worldviews and institutions? What changed and how?
- Describe the types of interaction that Europe colonizers, scholars, and converts have had with Buddhist institutions, texts and practices. How have these interactions influenced Buddhism?
- Explain the concepts of two genealogies of Buddhist resistance to the state and the state's appropriation of Buddhist authority and legitimacy. How do these modern

developments differ from relations between monks and kings in traditional Buddhist kingdoms?

- 'If the genealogy of cultural forms is about their circulation across regions, the history of these forms is about their ongoing domestication into local practice' (Arjun Appadurai, 1996: 17). How does this statement apply to Buddhism in Southeast Asia today?

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Notes

1 This essay makes use of several revised passages taken from my recent book, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies and Civil Society* (Schober 2011) and I thank the University of Hawai'i Press for their permission. In my use of the notion of 'conjuncture' I follow David Scott, who defines it as a pivotal historical moment in which potential developments are circumscribed by cognitive, cultural, and political contingencies (Scott 1999: 4–5, 18–19).

2 *Pattam nikkujjana kamma*, the refusal to accept donations from a donor, is discussed in the Cullavagga V, 20, of the Vinaya. It constitutes a reversal of the kind of ritual exchange that structured traditional Theravāda Buddhist societies. Its enactment often precipitates social upheaval and directly challenges established political authority.

2 Buddhism in Modern Sri Lanka

Stephen C. Berkwitz

Introduction

The island of Sri Lanka possesses a long history and a distinctive culture in which the Buddhist religion plays a prominent role. Lying close to the southern tip of India, Sri Lanka received Buddhist monks by the third century BCE, and sources suggest that the island's inhabitants quickly embraced Buddhist institutions and practices. Nurtured by contacts with Buddhist monks and monasteries in nearby South India, as well as being relatively free from strong Brahmanical influences early on, the Buddhist religion received the patronage of kings and rapidly assumed a dominant presence in the island. The impact of Buddhism in Sri Lankan history can be measured in two ways. One, there is a multitude of ancient Buddhist monasteries and archaeological sites throughout the island that testify to the long-standing and extensive presence of sites associated with Buddhist worship and practice. Two, there are numerous historical texts called *vaṃsa*s ('histories' or 'chronicles') composed in premodern Sri Lanka that detail the religious history of the island and ensure that the *sāsana*, or the texts and institutions established by the Buddha, occupies a central place in historical narratives.

This combination of Buddhist sites and texts forms the basis for recognizing Sri Lanka as a place where the Buddha's religion has flourished for millennia. Such assertions have come to possess politically charged significance in debates over national identity and multiculturalism in modern Sri Lanka. However, from the perspectives of ancient Buddhist texts such as the *Mahāvaṃsa* (Great Chronicle) from the sixth century CE, Sri Lanka occupies a special place as the so-called *dhammadīpa*, or 'island of the Dharma,' wherein the Buddha himself visited the island and prophesied that his *sāsana* would illumine the land and be established there for posterity (Geiger 2001: 3–9, 55). The legacy of this view worked to shape the ways in which Buddhist monks and laypersons in later centuries portrayed the close links between the *sāsana* and the state, even contributing to the medieval idea that the kings of the island should be righteous *bodhisattva*s whose moral virtue reinforces their command. Meanwhile, Buddhist kings bolstered their authority by donating lands, monasteries, food, robes, and other monastic requisites to the Sri Lankan *saṅgha*. The *saṅgha*, in turn, confirmed the moral righteousness of kings by accepting their donations and by consenting to periodic purifications of the monkhood as initiated by the king. Alongside these political and religious authorities existed a largely Buddhist populace that typically showed its loyalty to both.

The challenges of colonialism

Prior to the sixteenth century in Sri Lanka, there was little doubt as to the primacy of Buddhism in the island's religious and political spheres. The purification of the monkhood by King Parākramabāhu I (r. 1153–86) resulted in a largely unified *saṅgha*

that adhered to the conservative vision of the Theravada order that stressed strict monastic discipline and the acceptance of a closed canon of Pāli Buddhist scriptures. The predominance of Theravāda Buddhist texts, teachings, and practices marginalized Hindu forms, although Brahmanical rituals and the worship of Hindu deities were also known in medieval Sri Lanka. However, dramatic changes to the social order took place in the decades after the entry of the Portuguese into Colombo in 1506. Originally interested in gaining access to Sri Lanka's famed supply of spices, gems, and elephants, the Portuguese presence in the island gradually evolved from a trading factory to a system of direct colonial rule by the end of the sixteenth century. Starting in 1543, Franciscan missionaries began a project to convert the island's inhabitants and make them loyal to the Portuguese crown. The Catholic missions in Sri Lanka gained numerous converts from lower castes along the coasts who had more contact with the Portuguese and more to gain from becoming Christian. Few other Sinhala Buddhists in the island converted, however, until after the Portuguese gained direct political control of the maritime districts in 1597.

The latter part of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century were turbulent eras in Sri Lankan history. Numerous battles were fought between Portuguese-led armies and hostile Sinhala armies, which led to great hardship and destruction throughout the lowland areas of the island. Buddhist monks were driven out of Portuguese-controlled areas, while Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples were frequently destroyed and replaced by churches. Conversion to Christianity was made attractive by the increased benefits that Christians received by being placed under the authority of the King of Portugal rather than local kings and local laws (Strathern 2007: 111). The conflicts between Sinhala Buddhists and Portuguese colonialists resulted in an environment where Buddhist practice and scholarship were difficult to undertake. Many local Buddhist customs and institutions were disrupted and displaced from lowland Sri Lanka, while some monks and Buddhist practices were sustained with great effort in the highland kingdom of Kandy, which remained independent of Portuguese rule.

The Portuguese remained in Sri Lanka until 1658, when they were ousted by the Dutch, who sought to strengthen their own trading networks in Asia. Although the Dutch Calvinists were generally more tolerant of Buddhism in the island, they took steps to convert the islanders to their form of Christianity, albeit without much success. Their presence in the maritime regions of the island continued to put pressure on Buddhist institutions and inhibited the practice of the religion in the areas under their control. The Dutch colonialists were followed by the British, who assumed control of Dutch-held territories in Sri Lanka starting in 1796. The British had interests in expanding their overseas empire, and 'Ceylon' (as Sri Lanka was known at that time) offered strategic naval importance and good commercial opportunities for their imperial projects.

The British soon adopted the objectives of conquering the whole of the island, which they did in 1815, and of 'civilizing' it after their own ideals. In the same year the British colonial government signed a treaty called the Kandyan Convention, which obliged the British to maintain the support given to the *saṅgha* as traditionally done by the island's rulers. Not surprisingly, there was scant British support for Sri Lanka's *saṅgha*, and colonial efforts to build schools and hospitals actually reduced the traditional role of Buddhist monks in providing medicine and education to the laity. Meanwhile, some British civil servants such as T. W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) and Robert Caesar Childers (1838–76) pursued 'Oriental Studies' in Ceylon with the assistance of Sinhala Buddhist monks and helped to promote the study of Pāli Buddhist literature and Buddhism's historical origins. The interest shown by western scholars in Buddhist literature and thought continued to grow throughout the colonial period and even influenced the ways in which Sinhala Buddhists valued Pāli language texts and the 'rational' doctrines attributed to the Buddha.

Although some British colonialists were positively disposed toward Sri Lanka's form of Theravāda Buddhism, there were many others who were hostile to it. Numerous Christian missionaries from Great Britain in the latter part of the nineteenth century wrote and spoke of Sri Lankan Buddhism in highly critical terms. Unlike the earlier Portuguese missionaries who showed little interest in the religion they were trying to replace, these British Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists often sought to learn something of Buddhism in order to counter it more effectively. Their exclusivist views of truth led many Protestant missionaries to condemn Buddhism as a heathen religion characterized by atheism, idolatry, and a nihilistic goal of nirvana (Harris 2006: 55–6). Convinced of their own righteousness and frustrated by the difficulty they had in engaging Sinhala Buddhists in religious disputes, British missionaries began to publish polemical tracts to propagate Christianity and to reject and ridicule Buddhist doctrines. Eventually, Sinhala Buddhists began to respond, first by petitioning the colonial government to reprimand the missionaries for their offensive publications, and when this failed to achieve the desired result, by using printing presses to publish tracts defending Buddhism. The Buddhist response came to a head in a series of public debates held between converted Sinhala missionaries and Buddhist monks between 1864 and 1873. The most famous debate was held in the village of Panadura on August 26 and 28, 1873, where the monks led by Ven. Mohoṭṭivattē Guṇānanda (1823–90) vigorously rebutted Christian critiques and won the acclaim of the many thousands of people in attendance (Malalgoda 1976: 225–6).

The successive colonial rules by the Portuguese, Dutch, and British lasted from the later sixteenth century up to February 4, 1948 when 'Ceylon' declared itself independent from British rule. The long history of colonialism in the island had severely weakened Buddhist institutions but did not lead to the conversion of more than about ten percent of the island's population. In the meantime, however,

numerous monasteries and libraries were razed during the period of Portuguese rule, while legal restrictions were established to curtail the activities of Buddhist monks throughout much of the colonial period as a whole. The resulting decline of the *saṅgha* led to a condition where by the mid-eighteenth century there were no more Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka who had undergone the higher ordination ceremony (*upasampadā*). A new ordination tradition called the Siyam Nikāya was established by visiting Theravāda monks from Siam (Thailand) in 1753, which enabled new monastic reforms to be made by the leader of this new monastic order, Ven. Väliviṭa Saraṇaṁkara (1698–1778). Subsequently, the high-caste restrictions for ordination in the Siyam Nikāya and competing interests in adopting stricter interpretations of monastic discipline led to the formation of two newer monastic orders – the Amarapura Nikāya in 1803 and the Rāmañña Nikāya in 1864 – by Sinhala monks who were ordained in Burma. Thus, by the late nineteenth century, indigenous efforts to reform Buddhism, and exposure to the discourses on Buddhism of Orientalist scholars and Christian missionaries, were salient forces behind the modernization of Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Buddhist modernism

Attempts to reform and modernize Buddhism in Sri Lanka originated from both local and western sources. In response to the decline and disestablishment of Buddhism during the colonial era, Sinhala Buddhists looked for ways to revive their religion. Ven. Saraṇaṁkara was an important advocate for reforming the *saṅgha* through the study and preaching of Pāli texts long before western Orientalists added their support for focusing on ancient canonical works rather than medieval vernacular ones (Blackburn 2001: 199). Further, nineteenth-century Buddhist monks were often instrumental in guiding and advising early European scholars in their own studies of Buddhist literature. At the same time, the writings of Orientalists such as Rhys Davids and Edwin Arnold helped to shape people's views about Buddhism abroad and in the island. The consequent development of a reform-minded, modernist Buddhism in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a turning point in the history of the religion in Sri Lanka.

Scholars have called this phenomenon 'Buddhist Modernism' or 'Protestant Buddhism' in order to highlight some of the newer, more salient features found in the religion since the late nineteenth century in Sri Lanka. Although known by different labels, this reinterpretation of Buddhism in modern Sri Lanka emerged out of the encounters with European colonialism, Orientalist scholarship, and Christian missionaries. The long and intensive history of colonialism in Sri Lanka led to the development of a modernistic type of Buddhism there before other Asian countries. The German Buddhologist Heinz Bechert coined the term 'Buddhist Modernism' and defined it as follows:

> Buddhist modernism is characterized by the emphasis laid on rationalist elements in Buddhist teachings, by the belief that the teachings of Buddhism and those of modern science are not only in conformity but identical, by the tacit elimination of the traditional cosmology, and by a reinterpretation of the objective of the Buddhist religion in terms of social reform and the building of a better world.
>
> *(Bechert 1973: 91)*

Elsewhere, in an earlier book published in German, Bechert noted that Buddhist Modernism is also characterized in part by the creation of lay religious organizations that did not previously exist (Bechert 1966: 38). For him, the primary ethos animating this modern interpretation of Buddhism is the attempt to bridge the traditional gap between otherworldly and this-worldly practices and aims, transforming a religion of world-renunciation into one stressing societal reform and human development here and now.

Similarly, the concept of 'Protestant Buddhism' has been utilized by scholars to describe the reinterpretation of Buddhism in Sri Lanka after the encounters with Protestant Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century. First coined by the Sri Lankan anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere in 1970, 'Protestant Buddhism' has come to symbolize the development of a new form of Buddhism that both imitated some of the characteristics of Protestant Christianity and yet also served to *protest* the influences of those same missionaries and the British colonial system that was seen to support them. Its salient feature is said to revolve around the efforts of laypeople to permeate their lives with Buddhism, while not depending upon the monkhood or traditional rituals but instead internalizing and universalizing the teachings of the Buddha to emphasize individual striving toward nirvana (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 215–16). This development is said to have developed first among middle-class urban Buddhists in the Colombo area who had greater access to British education and greater familiarity with the discourses of scientific rationalism and Protestant Christianity. The result of this exposure was to encourage many Sinhala Buddhists to adopt the ethical values of Victorian-era Protestantism and to stress the alleged rationalism of the Buddha's canonical teachings while dismissing the ritualistic and vulgar features of traditional village Buddhism (Obeyesekere 1972: 61–2).

Despite the substantial overlap between these two theoretical concepts, scholars tend to favor the term 'Buddhist Modernism' over 'Protestant Buddhism.' Among the problems with the latter is the fact that modern Sri Lankan Buddhism continues to stress self-effort over faith, denying the existence of a creator God, while retaining a plethora of rituals and encouraging the 'monasticization' of lay Buddhist practice in terms of encouraging meditation and moral restraint (Holt 1991: 309). Moreover, the term 'Protestant Buddhism' might also imply that Buddhists depended too heavily on Protestantism and simply imitated its forms unthinkingly. 'Buddhist Modernism,'

on the other hand, emphasizes that a new, rationalistic and this-worldly form of the religion was fashioned in connection with a myriad of forces and pressures associated with modern life. Like all religious traditions, Buddhism has been forced to respond to the axioms of modernity that value individualism, egalitarianism, democratic ideals, social reform, scientific truths, and human creativity (McMahan 2008: 13, 63).

Whichever concept is used, it is clear that Sinhala Buddhists as a whole played a major role in fashioning a modernized form of Buddhism that drew creatively from the discourses and ideals of both local and Western authorities. A good example of the hybrid origins of Buddhist Modernism are the contributions made to this phenomenon by the Sinhala lay Buddhist organizer Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933) and the American Theosophist Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907). Olcott arrived in Sri Lanka in 1880, and quickly set out to assist Sinhala Buddhists in developing Buddhist schools, a Buddhist flag, and a Buddhist catechism that could strengthen the religion's foundations in the island. Dharmapala, meanwhile, went further in founding the ideals and institutional framework to support Buddhist Modernism in Sri Lanka. Asserting that he was in fact reviving the authentic religion that started with the Buddha himself, Dharmapāla grafted British and Christian discourses onto his new vision of Buddhism, arguing that the practice of Buddhist morality and hard work would lead to the regeneration of Buddhism and Sinhala culture that had both declined under the harmful influences of colonialism (Seneviratne 1999: 28–9). Dharmapala's program, which set the stage for the development of Buddhist Modernism, called on Buddhist monks to become like missionaries in preaching to the public and enjoining people to embrace the true moral and philosophical basis of the religion and to put the religion's ideals into practice in their everyday lives. The adaptation of Buddhism to reflect modernist values and address societal concerns became lasting hallmarks of the practice of the religion in modern Sri Lanka.

Female renunciation

The steps taken to reform and modernize Buddhism in the early twentieth century effectively refashioned the religion to suit the modern, urban preferences of western-educated Sinhala Buddhists. Seeking to compete with – rather than capitulate to – Christian missionaries, Buddhist reformers sought to develop the religion in ways that would demonstrate its rational and modern features. The more that Buddhism in Sri Lanka could be seen to resemble the values of modernity, the better able it would be to resist the missionaries' critiques of its allegedly backward and superstitious nature. A handful of Buddhist reformers sought to employ women in the task of promoting and reforming the Buddha's religion in Sri Lanka. Centuries after the ordination tradition of Buddhist *bhikkhunī*s (or 'nuns') disappeared from the island, Dharmapāla and a handful of Sinhala and Western women established

the new Buddhist vocation of the 'Ten-Precept Mother' (*dasa sil mātā*) to teach children and reinforce the moral virtues of the religion in Sri Lankan society. These women shaved their heads, wore yellow robes, and adhered to the moral discipline of the Ten Precepts in their everyday life. However, because of the absence of fully ordained *bhikkhunī*s who have undergone the higher ordination ceremony in all Theravāda Buddhist societies, the Ten Precept Mothers occupied a liminal status between laywoman and nun.

One of the leading figures in this movement to restart a community of female Buddhist renunciants in Sri Lanka was a woman named Catherine de Alwis (1849–1939), a Christian convert who turned to Buddhism after the deaths of her parents. De Alwis traveled to Burma for instruction as an un-ordained 'lay nun' before returning to Sri Lanka to establish a center for *upāsikā*s, or female practitioners of the Dharma, in 1906. Having taken the name 'Sudharmā' after renouncing lay life, she headed the center where other women could adopt the lifestyle of female renunciants who follow the Theravāda teachings without being formally ordained as a *bhikkhunī*. Although such female Buddhist renunciants are widely seen to occupy subordinate positions to Buddhist monks and are therefore less attractive recipients for donations from the laity, the *dasa sil mātā* survived in relatively small numbers throughout the twentieth century. And until recently, most of these women expressed little interest in receiving higher ordination as *bhikkhunī*s, since this would cause them to become formally subordinated to the authority of monks (Bartholomeusz 1994: 136). This is the result of a Theravāda monastic code (Vinaya) that compels *bhikkhunī*s to submit to the administrative control of male *bhikkhu*s by adopting the so-called 'Eight Heavy Rules,' which require nuns to recognize the seniority and authority of monks.

Since the 1990s there has been substantial growth in the numbers and the status of female Buddhist renunciants in Sri Lanka. The ecumenical work of Sakyadhita, an international association for Buddhist women, and Buddhist nuns from Taiwan and other East Asian countries, have spurred efforts to re-establish the lineage of Theravāda *bhikkhunī*s in the modern world. Several Sri Lankan women participated in a higher ordination (*upasampadā*) ceremony held in Sarnath, India in 1996, which stirred controversy in Sri Lanka since the nuns who helped to conduct the ceremony for the novices were from a Korean 'Mahāyāna' lineage. Numerous Sri Lankan critics derided this event as a Mahāyāna ordination rather than a Theravāda ordination. Supporters of the event countered that since history shows that Chinese Buddhist women were first ordained by Sri Lankan nuns in 434 CE, the so-called 'Mahāyāna' nuns from East Asia were themselves originally ordained by Sri Lankan Theravāda nuns. Another *upasampadā* ceremony for Theravāda *bhikkhunī*s was held at Bodh Gaya, India in Februrary 1998.

Then in March 1998, for the first time in modern history, the *upasampadā* was

conferred upon Sinhala Buddhist women in Sri Lanka at the Dambulla Golden Temple, an event that effectively reintroduced the Theravāda *bhikkhunī* lineage in Sri Lanka after an absence of around 800 years. The preparations for this event began in 1997, following the Sarnath *upasampadā*, in talks led by Ven. Ināmaḷuvē Sumaṅgala, chief monk at the Dambulla Golden Temple, an ex-monk named Raja Dharmapala, and some of the island's senior *dasa sil mātā*s (Salgado 2000: 33). This group invited applications from other female renunciants to participate in an educational training program designed to prepare them for novice and then later *bhikkhunī* ordination. Following the training course at an institute founded at the Golden Temple, 22 of the novice nuns traveled from Dambulla to Bodh Gaya in order to receive the Higher Ordination according to the Theravada traditions under the auspices of a group of India-based Sri Lankan monks, along with monks and nuns from Taiwan. Those newly ordained *bhikkhunī*s then returned to Sri Lanka and assisted in the *upasampadā* ceremony at Dambulla in March 1998.

It is important to note that although there remain numerous outspoken critics of the manner in which the *bhikkhunī* lineage was re-established in Sri Lanka through the participation of nuns from Mahayana countries, there appears to be increasing recognition and support given to these new Theravāda Buddhist nuns. Several ordination ceremonies for novices and *bhikkhunī*s have been held at the Golden Temple, leading to the steady growth of officially sanctioned female renunciants in Sri Lanka. Prior to founding an institute for training nuns and conferring the *upasampadā* upon qualified women, the *dasa sil mātā*s in Sri Lanka faced limits in their educational opportunities and their related activities. Many *dasa sil mātā*s were not expected to know much about Buddhist texts but were viewed as effective in social outreach activities including teaching and counseling women and children (Salgado 1996: 68–9). Such limited horizons were common for women who elected to join a community of female renunciants that had no formal, recognized status in terms of the Theravāda monastic code.

The recent efforts made to educate and ordain women as *bhikkhunī*s in Sri Lanka, however, have opened up new opportunities for women to dedicate themselves to a revered religious path that can come with better educational training and more respect from the laity. Recent estimates hold that a few thousand *dasa sil mātā*s and nearly a thousand *bhikkhunī*s can be found in Sri Lanka in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Yet there has not been a dramatic shift of *dasa sil mātā*s becoming *bhikkhunī*s in Sri Lanka, largely since the 'lay nuns' express a reluctance to jeopardize their hard-earned relationships with lay supporters by seeking the still-disputed *bhikkhunī* status (Sasson 2010: 82). Nevertheless, the overall numbers of female Buddhist renunciants in the island, including both Sinhala and foreign women, may be expected to grow as the opportunities for education, recognition, and spiritual fulfillment expand.

Buddhist nationalism

The modernizing trends among Sri Lankan Buddhism since the nineteenth century have given rise to a form of Buddhist nationalism that fuses religious ideals with political activity. The world-renouncing ethos that defines Buddhism is seen by many Sri Lankans to be incompatible with the worldly sphere of politics, and the entrance of Buddhist monks into political arenas has been widely criticized by the Sinhala Buddhist laity. However, when Anagārika Dharmapāla began to encourage early twentieth-century monks to lead the religious and social reforms he envisioned for the country, monastic involvement in politics eventually followed. Dharmapāla's original vision centered around Buddhist monks who would abandon their village rites and practice of medicine and astrology in order to become preachers who instruct the laity on the development of a Buddhist morality, which would in turn become the basis for promoting the dignity and prosperity of the nation (Seneviratne 1999: 40). According to this perspective, monks should become actively involved in Sinhala society, improving the morality of all citizens and bringing about a cultural revival in order to lay the foundations for a vibrant and independent nation-state. The Buddha's Dharma thus represents a valuable resource for securing individual comforts and the collective welfare of the people.

The idea that Buddhism could serve as a resource to strengthen the Sinhala nation survived Dharmapāla's death and took root in the thinking of many Sinhala Buddhists. Following Dharmapāla, they saw Buddhism as having a distinctively special role in the formation of Sinhala culture and national identity. And in the wake of several centuries of colonial rule in Sri Lanka, numerous Sinhala Buddhists concluded that a revival of Buddhism held the key to a broader cultural revival that could pave the way toward independence from Great Britain. Early twentieth-century monks tended to emphasize the role of rural development in bringing about a national regeneration. Monks like Ven. Kalukoṇḍayāvē Paññasekhara (1895–1977) promoted the economic uplift of rural villages through development projects, crime eradication, and temperance, which were all ultimately rooted in the development of Buddhist morality along with other virtues such as cleanliness, activeness, and punctuality (ibid.: 71). The involvement of Buddhist monks in twentieth-century social welfare projects probably owes something to the growing nationalist sentiments in the island as well as the model of the Christian missionary being engaged in similar kinds of activities. It also allowed the monks to reclaim a more central role in society after having been somewhat marginalized by the development of colonial-sponsored institutions such as hospitals and schools, which took over some of the traditional duties of the monks.

Later, in the 1940s during the final years of British rule in the island, a number of monks began to stress social service in national politics as part of the proper role of a Buddhist monk. The willingness of certain monks to engage in political debates and activities was spurred by their exposure to Indian nationalists who likewise

campaigned against the British imperial presence in their country (ibid.: 131). In the years leading up to independence in 1948 and afterwards, Sri Lankan society witnessed vigorous debates over the legitimacy of monastic involvement in politics. One of the more prominent advocates for the political monks was Ven. Walpola Rāhula (1907–97), the author of *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu* (published in Sinhala earlier in 1946) and the recipient of a doctoral degree in France. Rāhula was one of many influential twentieth-century monks who publicly argued that Buddhist monks have a duty to serve the nation by advising the country's leaders on political issues and by mobilizing popular support for righteous policies. According to Rāhula, Sinhala Buddhist monks have had an age-old function in lending their wisdom and guidance to the island's rulers, a role that was interrupted only by the onset of European colonialism. This stance proved appealing to many monks who sought to gain more influence and recognition, as well as to serve the nation, by becoming involved in political affairs.

Monastic involvement in the country's politics helped to strengthen the bonds between religion and the state in Sri Lanka during the 1950s. In response to the widespread perception of the decline of the *saṅgha* and Buddhist practice under European colonialism, Buddhist nationalists argued for the need to promote and protect the religion from various external threats. The year 1956 was publicly recognized in Sri Lanka as the Buddha Jayanthi, which marked 2500 years since the Buddha passed away. It was also the year of fateful elections wherein a new party that promoted a Buddhist nationalist agenda was swept into office, setting off a chain of events that strengthened the formal associations between Buddhism and the Sri Lankan state. A report entitled 'The Betrayal of Buddhism,' which was commissioned by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, was published in 1956 and condemned the negative effects of Christian missions and, especially, the state-funded English schools run by missionaries in the island. The report basically criticized the withdrawal of the government's traditional support of Buddhist institutions and its subsequent support given to schools and hospitals run by Christian organizations. In the same year, a number of monks formed a political organization to campaign actively for the new party that promised to support Buddhist interests. In the years that followed, Sinhala Buddhists took steps to raise the standing of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by, among other things, nationalizing private schools and writing a new Constitution in 1972 that asserted Buddhism would be given the 'foremost place' among religions in the country, and that it was the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while still assuring fundamental rights to members of other religions.

Other government policies had the unfortunate effect of alienating the country's substantial Tamil minority, and provoked communal riots in 1956, 1958, 1977, and 1983. A Tamil rebel organization called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) formed in 1976 and began an armed conflict with the government in 1983 following the riots that led to the deaths of up to several thousand Tamils in the island's cities.

The LTTE eliminated rival Tamil politicians in a largely successful attempt to become the sole spokespersons for the island's Tamil population. It employed terrorist tactics, sometimes targeting Buddhist monks and sacred sites, in efforts to secure a separate Tamil state. Up to the military defeat of the LTTE in 2009, the civil war contributed to the deaths of tens of thousands of citizens and became a *cause célèbre* for Buddhist nationalists who warned of the dangers still facing Buddhism in postcolonial Sri Lanka. Numerous Buddhist monks participated in protests against the LTTE and foreign bodies that were believed to be supporting the Tamil separatist cause, such as the Norwegian government. At times, this led to the somewhat incongruous sight of orange-robed Buddhist monks participating in pro-war rallies to support the military and to protest various peace proposals.

Following several assassinations of political leaders and failed peace initiatives, Buddhist nationalism acquired a more assertive profile in the waning years of the conflict with the LTTE. Calls for pursuing a military solution echoed from increasing numbers of Buddhist monks and politicians. While others sought to reassert the centrality of Buddhism in response to various social ills like crime and poverty, which were perceived to be on the rise, the country spent huge sums on the war and lost valuable tourism revenue each time a bomb explosion cast Sri Lanka onto worldwide headlines. At the same time, the intrusion of global economic and cultural forms along with Christian missions from abroad sparked a backlash against foreign influences that were said to threaten the island's religious and cultural heritage. A monk named Ven. Gangodawila Soma (1948–2003) launched a public campaign to promote Buddhist righteousness as a path to increase national prosperity and protect Sinhala cultural heritage. Through regular television appearances, newspaper columns, and sermons delivered at temples around the island, Soma helped to galvanize support for a nationalist program that could defend Buddhism and the nation from an array of foreign forces and influences that threatened to undermine them (Berkwitz 2008). The World Bank, Hindi films, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are just some of the many foreign entities that have drawn criticism from nationalists for the allegedly harmful effects they have on Buddhism and Sinhala culture.

Evidence of this growing hostility in Sri Lanka toward the agents of globalization is seen in the formation of a political party called the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) led by Buddhist monks. This newly formed party won enough votes to secure nine seats in Parliament for the party's monastic leaders in 2004. The monks who became parliamentarians began to advocate for passing legislation to criminalize 'unethical conversions,' to restrict sales of alcohol and cigarettes, and to monitor the activities of NGOs working in the island. Intra-party squabbles and high-profile resignations have hurt the public image of the JHU, but it continues to operate as a minority party that can leverage its numbers to gain political influence and promote its efforts to make Sri Lanka into a 'righteous state.' The appearance of robed monks participating as

politicians remains controversial in Sri Lanka and invites public and private criticism about the morality and decorum of these monk-politicians.

Whether monks run for political office or simply throw their support behind one or another political party, they find substantial benefits as well as risks in doing so. Although the redefinition of the monk's role to include social service opened the door for a more vigorous and visible place for Buddhist monks in Sri Lankan politics, the opportunities to regain social status and influence lost during the colonial years also exposed monks to charges that they were becoming too worldly. Monks who seek out rich and powerful patrons in the form of local politicians or East Asian Buddhist donors stand to attract financial support to undertake building projects for monasteries and schools in Sri Lanka and abroad (cf. Seneviratne 1999: 212–23). Political patronage is often available to leading monks who will publicly support a particular winning candidate or party in elections. However, for those who support the losing side, they may run the risk of losing support or facing retribution from political opponents. During the run-up to the presidential election in 2010, charges of harboring assault rifles and hand grenades at a Colombo temple were leveled against a monk who supported the opposition party against the sitting President Mahinda Rajapakse. Then the arrest of the opposition presidential candidate former General Sarath Fonseka led several high-ranking monks to criticize the government and call for a special convention of the island's leading monks to discuss the political developments in the country. This gathering, however, was later called off due to reports of government pressure. It seems that monastic involvement in politics may also put those same monks at risk of becoming embroiled in partisan disputes and being subject to political intimidation.

Contemporary debates and practice

Buddhism in contemporary Sri Lanka retains an influential place in private lives and public affairs. Concerns over preserving Sinhala Buddhist culture continue, while at the same time many adherents focus their efforts on practices used to obtain this-worldly and otherworldly benefits. Regarding the former aim, Buddhists in Sri Lanka regularly encounter public statements and displays that reaffirm the integral relation between the religion and the nation. Newspapers in Sinhala and English carry stories and editorials that relate aspects of Buddhist history in the island and discuss various aspects of Buddhist thought as it relates to contemporary life. Most television stations broadcast images of Buddhist observances at sacred shrines and during important holidays such as Wesak – the day commemorating the birth, Awakening, and passing of the Buddha. Meanwhile Sinhala politicians and leading monks frequently make statements in the media regarding the significance of Buddhism. One effect of these public displays and pronouncements on Buddhism is to strengthen the association



Figure 2.1 Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse receives blessings from Buddhist monks in Colombo (January 2010)

between religion and the nation, reminding many people of the privileged and dominant position that Buddhism enjoys in the island. Another effect is to spur public debates over what really constitutes Buddhism and what aspects may be singled out as different or inauthentic (Abeysekara 2002: 3–4). These debates over the nature of 'true' Buddhism can occur in public forums and in private conversations, and they remind people that the central place given to Buddhism in Sri Lankan society masks various disputes and differences in defining what counts as 'Buddhist' and what does not. Modern scholarship by Sri Lankans and westerners has contributed to and reinforced these definitions, as the study of Buddhism has frequently involved scholarly judgments made on what is 'traditional' and 'orthodox' versus what is 'modern' or 'syncretic' (De Silva 2006: 166). Likewise, definitions of what is 'traditional' influences lay expectations for monastic behavior and is responsible for a growing cynicism about the diminishing virtue of many monks in Sri Lanka.

Alongside efforts to define what 'true' Buddhism consists of, contemporary Sri Lankans often place a premium on efforts to preserve the Buddha's Dharma and work to promote it in society. Giving donations to the *saṅgha* in theory not only helps Buddhists to earn merit, which is held to improve their present and future lives, but

is also seen as a way to support the religion in the face of various modern threats and pressures undermining its existence. Some Buddhists sponsor efforts to erect large Buddha images in public places, including cities with multi-ethnic and multi-religious populations, thereby sometimes sparking tensions in those communities. Elsewhere the performance of particular religious ceremonies and the publication of editions or translations of ancient Buddhist texts are also presented as symbols of the Sinhala cultural heritage. Public expressions of the Buddhist religion can thus serve a variety of interests, including those that seek to preserve the centrality and indeed the very survival of Buddhism in contemporary Sri Lanka.

Nevertheless, the various challenges and pressures that Sinhala Buddhists face in the context of their daily lives can overshadow the symbolic importance of their religion in the public sphere. People seeking to earn merit to improve the conditions of their existence now and in the future will still continue to perform various religious acts connected with merit-making. Giving alms (*dāna*) to monks and others in need, making offerings to the Buddha and the gods that support him (*pūjā*), and inviting monks (and sometimes nuns) to chant protective Pāli verses (*pirit*) in one's home are all popular practices among Sinhala Buddhists. The desire to do merit and thus earn future benefits remains strong among most Buddhists in Sri Lanka, even if economic hardships might cause them to cut back or alter how these rituals are performed. For instance, the expenses associated with large-scale *pirit* ceremonies, usually involving costs associated with feeding several monks and large numbers of guests for several hours in the night and early morning, have been reduced by a decision to sponsor shorter ceremonies with fewer monks and attendees. Meanwhile, some Sinhala Buddhists have sought to improve their lives by practicing *vipassanā* meditation, either at Buddhist temples under the guidance of monks or at lay-run meditation centers. Although such lay meditation practice in Sri Lanka appears to be less popular than it is in other Theravāda communities around Asia, it is striking to see significant numbers of urban, middle class Sinhala Buddhists practice meditation for the economic, social, and political benefits it is believed to offer. Although many meditation teachers are Sri Lankan by birth, several transnational meditation gurus like S. N. Goenka and Ajahn Chah also exert considerable influence on lay meditators in the island (Bond 2003: 52). Similarly, some Sinhala Buddhists have turned to social activism as a way to express their religious commitments. The participation of some monks and laypersons in charitable and development organizations designed to help the poor around the island is one prominent example. Local NGOs inspired by Buddhist principles such as Sarvodaya, Janavijaya, and Dam Rivi have been formed to mobilize money and volunteers on projects to alleviate rural poverty, supply disaster relief, and to provide goods and counseling to people in need.

In conclusion, Buddhism remains an influential, multifaceted presence in modern Sri Lanka. Its contemporary expressions have been conditioned by the experiences

of Sinhala Buddhists with European colonialism, Christian missions, Orientalist scholarship, ideas and aspirations of gender equality, partisan politics, ethnic separatists, and global political and development organizations. Although frequently spoken of as a single, unified tradition, Buddhism in modern Sri Lanka is a confluence of various, sometimes contradictory, ideas and practices. For some people, Buddhism is a symbol of national unity and a cultural heritage that is unique to Sri Lanka. For others, Buddhism is something that transcends national and doctrinal boundaries, and enables Sinhalas to participate in global exchanges of ideas and institutions with other people around the world. And for many, Buddhism offers a path to a better life in the present and the future, connecting them to an age-old tradition practiced by their parents and ancestors in Sri Lanka. Indeed for most Sinhala Buddhists, Buddhism is a combination of a local tradition and a global religion, one that informs their religious and national identity while linking them to other Buddhist groups and movements around the world. It is paradoxically under threat from nefarious (read: western, Christian, and ethnic separatist) forces that wish to make it obsolete, while at the same time it flourishes in the Buddhist Sunday Schools and forest hermitages located around the island. Like all religious traditions, Buddhism in Sri Lanka must adjust to new pressures and shifting environments associated with the modern world. However, with several centuries of practice in doing so, one expects that Sinhala Buddhists will continue both to preserve and to transform their religion in the years to come.

Summary

- Buddhism has a long history in Sri Lanka but was severely tested by the colonial control of the island by various European powers between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries.
- Sinhala Buddhists reacted to the influences of Christian missionaries and Orientalist scholars by reforming their religion to appear more modern and rational, while being based on the thought and practice found in its ancient Pāli canonical scriptures.
- Buddhist monks in twentieth-century Sri Lanka were entrusted with important roles in reviving the religion and Sinhala society by participating in politics and social service.
- Buddhist women in modern Sri Lanka have taken steps to create and revive traditions of female renunciation, creating for themselves opportunities to participate more fully in their religion as *dasa sil mātā*s or as *bhikkhunī*s.
- Nationalist concerns over the survival of Buddhism and the sovereignty of the nation have spurred efforts to employ Buddhist symbols and practices for the preservation of the religion and of Sinhala cultural heritage.

- Ongoing debates over what constitutes 'true' Buddhism can influence the rhetoric and practice of the religion in the contemporary period.

Discussion questions

- How has Sri Lanka's Buddhist history affected the ways that its citizens speak of and practice their religion? In what ways does the idea of 'tradition' shape modern Buddhist identity?
- How should one evaluate the experience of European colonialism on Buddhism in modern Sri Lanka? How might Sri Lankan Buddhism look today had it not been for the country's colonial history?
- To what degree is female Buddhist renunciation in Sri Lanka representative of progress toward gender equality? Is the co-existence of two religious paths for women – i.e. *dasa sil mātā*s ('lay nuns') and *bhikkhuni*s ('ordained nuns') – helpful for the realization of women's religious aims?
- Should Buddhist monks participate in political settings and hold political office in Sri Lanka? What are some arguments both for and against this phenomenon?
- How are Sinhala Buddhists likely to respond to the future challenges of globalization? Can Buddhism retain its local characteristics, or will it become increasingly molded by Buddhist traditions and practices in other parts of the world?

Further reading

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Abeysekara's work explores the different issues involved in defining Buddhist identity in modern Sri Lanka. It explores Buddhist and scholarly evaluations of nationalism among other topics.

Bartholomeusz, T. J. (1994) *Women under the Bo Tree: Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

One of the first comprehensive studies of the development of Buddhist female renunciation in modern Sri Lanka. It focuses on 'lay nuns,' as it was written prior to the reintroduction of *bhikkhuni*s in the island.

Blackburn, A. M. (2010) *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

An historical study of a nineteenth-century Buddhist monk that is used to explore how Sinhala Buddhists could participate in the British colonial project while taking steps to retain their local religious and cultural traditions.

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A detailed study of the origins and development of Protestant Buddhism in Sri Lanka, as well as more recent 'Post-Protestant' trends toward embracing practices associated with local spirits.

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3 Searching for a Place to Sit: Buddhists in Modern Japan

Clark Chilson

Introduction

In 2007 the scholar of religion Ishii Kenji published a book of statistical data on religion in Japan taken from numerous major surveys. We could easily hand-select data from this book to piece together a mosaic that depicts Japanese Buddhism sailing through the mainstream of Japanese contemporary culture. We find, for example, that more people say they have faith in Buddhism than any other religion in Japan; that there are over 75,000 Buddhist temples, which claim over 93 million members; and that just in the traditional Buddhist organizations alone, there are over 125,000 clerics.

Yet, to see Buddhism in Japan today as enjoying a secure, comfortable social position would require that we ignore mountains of other data. Major surveys consistently show that the majority of Japanese deny having faith in Buddhism, and thus call into question the meaning, if not the accuracy, of temple membership claims, since the Japanese population is only about 126 million. The direction of change has also been negative. The number of people aged 13 to 59 who expressed faith or even an interest in traditional Buddhism fell from 54.3% to 25% between 1976 and 2002. The Japan General Social Survey found that in 2003 only 11.8% of the people it surveyed claimed to have faith in any religion, including Buddhism. Moreover, there is little trust in Buddhist institutions. A values survey conducted in 1998 indicated that only 13% of those surveyed said they trusted religious institutions. This percentage was the lowest of the 17 institutions on the survey, lower than even the 'press,' 'parliament,' and 'major companies' (Kisala 1999). If money speaks louder than words, the situation still looks poor. Statistics from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (Sōmushō) indicate that between 1976 and 2002 Japanese households on average spent less than 0.6 percent of their income on religion (Hanafusa 2005).

The problems facing Japanese Buddhism today and since the mid nineteenth century have to a great extent been modern ones. But it would be incorrect to simply attribute its difficulties to the Japanese becoming more suspect of religion as a result of modern science and education. While such a claim has supporters, it fails to adequately account for many of the social, legal, demographic, and political challenges Buddhism has coped with. When we move from static statistics to the flowing events of human history, we find that Buddhist leaders since the start of the modern era have vigorously tried to both adapt and persevere through the torrent of changes swept in by both domestic and global forces.

Despite vast changes, it could be argued that traditional Buddhist institutions never completely discarded their feudalistic past or overcame their long period of dependency on the state. Some of the most prominent scholars of modern Japanese Buddhism doubt that it ever modernized (Hayashi 2006: 205). A legion of different strategies have been tried for promoting Buddhism and its institutions – supporting state ideology, advocating adherence to precepts, helping the poor, supporting militarism, providing new rites – yet nothing has allowed them to escape a persistent

questioning of Buddhism's social relevance or to reverse the tide away from participation in Buddhist organizations. The story of Buddhism in modern Japan, or at least a possible interpretation of it, tells us that Buddhist institutions, leaders, and lay people have long sought to contribute to modern society and to find a place in it to comfortably situate their religion. Have they failed? How we answer this question depends on how we interpret the severity of the crises they faced, including those they were complicit in creating, and the ways in which they dealt with them.

Buddhism persecuted and disestablished

In the mid nineteenth century the timbers that supported Japan's Tokugawa regime were cracking under the weight of internal economic problems and the pressure from Western powers to open its ports for trade. After more than 260 years of rule, samurai rebels finally brought down the decrepit regime in 1868 and vowed to restore the emperor to power. Although the new period would be called a 'restoration' of imperial rule, it was less a step back to a previous time than a radical leap forward into Japan's first modern era, called Meiji (1868–1912), literally 'illuminated rule.' Meiji rulers ushered in a blizzard of changes that some Japanese Buddhist leaders feared were designed to eradicate their faith.

Shortly after taking power, the new Meiji government moved swiftly to disestablish Buddhism from the state apparatus, of which it had been a part for centuries. From the early seventeenth century, the government prohibited Christianity and established the *terauke* system in which all families were required to register with a Buddhist temple. Priests, who kept records of local populations, were given monopolistic rights over the funerary and memorial rites of their parishioners. During the Tokugawa period, clerics formed their own distinctive class, had prescribed social roles, and received financial support from the government in addition to what they received from their parishioners and, in some cases, from tenants who rented temple lands. Meiji policy makers changed all this. Within the first few years of the Meiji government, financial support of Buddhist priests stopped and new laws were passed that required families to register with government offices rather than temples. Families for the first time in many generations could freely change temple affiliation or decide not to belong to any temple. The special status that Buddhist clerics had had for centuries was removed, and they became commoners under new laws that eradicated the Tokugawa social-status system.

Although Buddhism had been the most powerful form of organized religion in Japan for over a thousand years, those in the new regime frequently characterized it as 'foreign.' Many of the Meiji government's founders were from domains in western Japan where anti-Buddhist sentiment ran high among rulers. These men saw Buddhist priests as parasites on society and as impediments to building a strong, modern

country. To implement an imperial ideology in which the emperor would be placed at the core of governance, they gave preferential treatment to the worship of Shinto deities, or *kami*, particularly those closely associated with the imperial household. Buddhism's connections with the imperial family were weakened by removing from the palace the Buddhist sanctuary with its memorial tablets, and by laicizing all members of the imperial family who were temple abbots (*monzeki*). Funerals for the imperial family going forward were to be Shinto, not Buddhist.

Powerful bureaucrats in the briefly established Divinity Department (Jingikan) issued edicts in 1868 to purify Shinto of Buddhism by ordering the separation of Shinto elements from Buddhist ones (*shinbutsu bunri*). The edicts demanded that Shinto shrines remove from their premises Buddhist bells and gongs as well as Buddhist priests, who had long served at them as ritualists. The edicts also stopped the use of Buddhist terms for *kami* and the depiction of *kami* with Buddhist statues.

Those hostile to Buddhism, particularly Shintoists and nativists newly appointed to positions of authority, read the edicts as legal sanctions to 'abolish Buddhism and destroy Shakyamuni' (*habutsu kishaku*). On Mount Hiei near Kyoto, for example, Shinto priests affiliated with Hie Shrine approached the Tendai monks who had controlled the shrine for centuries. They demanded the keys to the shrine but the monks refused to relinquish them. So the Shinto priests with about 50 armed men broke open the shrine doors, dragged out Buddhist statues and smashed them. This was not an isolated incident. Over the next few years many other Buddhist icons, works of art, and scriptures were desecrated and destroyed (Kishimoto 1956: 114–15). The government stated its opposition to such destruction, but did little to stop it. Over 100,000 temples, or more than half the total number, may have disappeared (Tamamuro 1997). Although the worst violence against temples was during the first three years of Meiji, it continued into the mid 1870s. Between 1872 and 1876 just under 18,000 temples were abolished, many of which were *kitō* temples that conducted ritual prayers for this-worldly benefits, such as healing. During the same five-year period, the number of Buddhist priests fell even more dramatically from more than 75,000 to 19,490 (Collcutt 1986).

Buddhism for a modern nation state

In this hostile context, Buddhist leaders scrambled to adjust. Some relayed rumors that the Meiji ideologues were trying to destroy Buddhism. Survival became paramount.

Japanese Buddhist institutions had a long history of supporting different political regimes and were eager to show how they could support the 'restoration of imperial rule' (*ōsei fukko*). Searching for strength in unity, Buddhist leaders overlooked their differences and formed inter-sectarian organizations. One of the most influential was the Pan-Sectarian Buddhist Ethical League (*Shoshū dōtoku kaimei*) that formed toward

the end of 1868. The league held frequent conferences to discuss such topics as the ‘oneness of Buddhist and imperial law.’ To show their support for the government, Buddhist leaders throughout the country spouted slogans such as ‘revere the emperor and serve the Buddha’ (*sonnō hōbutsu*), ‘love the country and protect the Dharma’ (*aikoku gohō*), ‘pacify and preserve the country (through Buddhism)’ (*chingo kokka*) (Davis 1992: 158). As a demonstration of their desire to contribute to the propagation of imperial ideology, some 3000 Buddhist priests joined in the Great Teaching Promulgation Campaign (*Daikyō senpu undō*) as instructors. They, along with Shinto priests, actors, and storytellers, urged people to venerate Shinto deities, become patriots, and obey the emperor. Some major temples, such as Nishi Honganji and Eiheiji, donated money to the new government to show their support.

The early Meiji period was also a time for reflection. Co-opting the hostile sentiments of many in the new government, Buddhists began to construct a history of Buddhism in the Tokugawa period as decadent (Klautau 2008). Tokugawa Buddhism thus became a foil against which they could define themselves and where they sought to go. Part of this redefinition of themselves involved blaming their own previous shortcomings for the persecutions. One of the leading Buddhists of the era, Fukuda Gyōkai, stated in 1875 that ‘Buddhists brought the recent persecution upon themselves by their own transgressions’ (Ketelaar 1990: 14). To eradicate these transgressions Fukuda, along with Shaku Unshō and other leading clerics, attempted their own restoration by seeking to revive what they saw as fundamental to Buddhism. In particular, they emphasized the Buddhist precepts, the most important of which prohibited killing, stealing, lying, illicit sex, and slandering the Three Jewels (the Buddha, the Buddhist teachings, and the clergy).

The urgency to maintain the precepts became acute in May 1872 when the government issued a statement saying, ‘From now on Buddhist clerics shall be free to eat meat, marry, grow their hair, and so on. Furthermore, they are permitted to wear ordinary clothing when not engaged in religious activities’ (Jaffe 2001: 72). This disturbed many Buddhist priests because they thought that the eating of meat and particularly marriage among the clergy would destroy Buddhism. Only the year before, a Buddhist priest could be flogged if caught having sex. Some saw the permissiveness condoned by this edict as more pernicious than even the separation edicts.

By the mid-1870s, government policies toward Buddhism softened and Buddhist leaders, particularly those of Shin Buddhism, slowly started to assert themselves. Shin Buddhist institutions were the least affected by anti-Buddhist policies. Shin priests, unlike those of other Buddhist sects, had a long tradition of marrying and eating meat, had not been ritualists at Shinto shrines, and had widespread popular support. Shin Buddhists were eager to support the state but also challenged some of its policies. When officials were sent to Toyama, for example, to close Shin temples, they confronted strong local opposition. In Fukui there was an uprising to protect

Shin, and in Mikawa young priests led locals in a protest that became violent, with one government official being killed (Ketelaar 1990: 77; Collcutt 1986: 164). Shin Buddhists were willing to support the state but would resist it when they saw it undermining their faith. Shimaji Mokurai, head of the major Shin temple Nishi Honganji, called for a separation of religion and government. He found support for this idea within the government and helped end the participation of Buddhist priests in the Great Teaching Promulgation Campaign in 1875.

Although there were disagreements over how to make Japan a stronger nation, one problem on which virtually all Buddhists, Shinto priests, and government officials agreed was the threat of Christianity to the country's future. While Western powers urged Japan to open its borders to missionaries, Christianity remained prohibited until 1873. After the practice of Christianity became legal, Buddhists produced anti-Christian publications and led anti-Christian campaigns. Buddhist intellectuals eagerly translated and propagated Western writings critical of Christianity, such as those by Voltaire. They wrote studies of Christianity ridiculing its doctrines as strange. Shimaji, for example, said the idea of Jesus' resurrection came from a 'crazy woman,' Mary Magdalene, who earlier in her life had been possessed by demons (Thelle 1987: 79). Well into the 1880s Buddhists were still calling for the eradication of Christianity, saying it was harmful to the nation.

The perceived threat of Christianity and the Western nations made learning about them urgent. Buddhist sects, particularly Shin Buddhist ones, sent young scholarly priests abroad to learn about Western societies. Buddhists sent to study at European universities started to change how Buddhism was studied in Japan. In the Tokugawa period (1603–1868) Buddhist scholars compared, classified, and ranked authoritative texts, or parts of them, to explain and enhance sectarian positions. That type of scholarship diminished as Japanese Buddhists learned new academic methods in Europe and engaged in issues debated outside Japan. In 1876 Nanjō Bun'yū and Kasahara Kenju were sent to England, where they studied with Max Müller at Oxford. They were followed by Takakusu Junjirō in 1890. At Oxford these three Shin Buddhists learned Indic languages and how to examine texts using critical historical and philological methods. Following the wider intellectual interests in the origins of religion current in the West, they searched for the origins of Buddhism and evidence on the life of the historical Buddha. They, like their European counterparts, focused on Buddhist texts and gave little attention to Buddhist practices. Because of the emphasis on texts and Japanese scholars' familiarity with Chinese texts as well as Indic ones, Japan by the 1920s would become a leading country for the study of Buddhism (Stone 1990).

As Japanese Buddhist scholarship progressed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were frequent attempts to show Buddhism's superiority to Christianity and other religions by presenting it as congruent with science and based on reason. One Buddhist writer in 1903 stated, 'Today's priests are very inclined

to assert that Buddhism is theoretically superior to Western religions and to parrot certain ideas – that Buddhism is a philosophy, a science, and that Western religions are neither true nor rational and are no match for Buddhism' (Kasahara 2001: 553).

Among the chief proponents of the idea of Buddhism as a religion based on reason were Buddhist reformers, many of whom were students of Western philosophy. The philosopher and influential Buddhist writer Inoue Enryo, for example, distinguished 'religion' from 'superstition,' seeing the latter as concerned with demonic forces. He also suggested that only the Buddhism consistent with science should be regarded as true Buddhism (Josephson 2006). Influential reformers agreed with Inoue, including members of the reform group 'The Association of New Buddhists' (*Shin Bukkyōto Dōshinkai*), who sought as one of their basic goals to rid Buddhism of all elements that they regarded as 'superstitious.'

While the understanding of Buddhism as a rational religion, or a philosophy even, might have enhanced the prestige of Buddhism in Western countries and among some intellectuals in Japan, it damaged the reputation of much domestic Buddhist activity. From the Tokugawa period through the modern period and up to today, most Japanese Buddhists have engaged with Buddhism primarily through rituals, not scriptural texts. Buddhism has been more about funerals, memorial rites or ritual prayers for this-worldly benefits, than about doctrinal claims. The emphasis from the late nineteenth century on Buddhist doctrines that were often presented as complementary to Western philosophical and scientific ideas led many to see common rituals as developments deviating from the essence of Buddhism. Claiming that true Buddhism was congruent with empirical science made it incongruent with what Buddhist priests and lay people actually did at temples. Modernist claims about Buddhism as a rational philosophy thus made the life-blood of Buddhism in Japan seem tainted.

Besides trying to make Buddhism seem rational, reformers challenged the leaders of Buddhist institutions to change. Some reformers in the early twentieth century started to question the emphasis placed on efforts to prop up the state. In the Ōtani-ha (a branch of Shin), for example, the Kiyozawa Manshi denied the idea that Buddhism should seek to support the government. He argued that more attention needed to be given to individual religious awakening and to making the sectarian organization less authoritarian. The Ōtani-ha leadership showed their authoritarian ways by defrocking him, although later it appointed him the head of the sect's university. Despite the efforts by Kiyozawa and other reformers, changes to sectarian hierarchical structures were minor.

Reformers also emphasized social welfare activities for the sick, the poor, the elderly, orphans, prisoners, and the disabled. Their newly found interest in social welfare stemmed not just from compassion for those struggling but also from the desire to show those in political power that Buddhism could be a useful religion

in society. Indeed, the government came to see Buddhist leaders as a means of gaining support for its policies. As Sheldon Garon points out: 'Home Ministry officials increasingly looked upon the established religions as natural allies in their managerial campaigns to improve social welfare, modernize daily habits, and ward off radical thought' (1997: 66).

Outside the establish Buddhist sects, there arose a number of new lay Buddhist movements that reflected a search to find new ways to respond to the social conditions of the early twentieth century. Two of these movements, Muga no ai (selfless love) and Ittōen, were shaped by Shin and Tolstoy. The former was founded in Tokyo by Itō Shōshin, a former Ōtani-ha priest. He thought there was a universal truth transcending any particular religion, namely selfless love, which he defined as abandoning oneself to the love of others and dedicating oneself to loving others. Realizing this truth and abandoning oneself to it by giving up all worldly attachments, he asserted, gave peace of mind. Similarly, the founder of Ittōen, Nishida Tenkō, also advocated abandoning all attachments, such as possessions and the seeking of profit. Inspired by Tolstoy's *My Religion* and particularly his statement 'Die if you want to live,' Nishida began an itinerant life of selfless service (Davis 1992: 190). He abandoned himself to the 'Light,' a concept of a deity similar to Amida Buddha that was most likely influenced by his upbringing in a devout Shin household. He started to gain a sizable following after the publication of his book *The Life of Repentance.* In 1936, he and his followers formed a small utopian community in Kyoto, which continues to survive and is well known for its practice of volunteering to clean toilets.

In contrast to Muga no ai and Ittōen, other new Buddhist organizations, particularly Nichiren Buddhist ones, were nationalistic. An influential founder of one such movement was Tanaka Chigaku, a former Nichiren priest. Chigaku thought Nichiren leaders should aggressively eradicate all false teachings, which for him were all non-Nichiren teachings. He called for the state to adopt Nichiren Buddhism based on the Lotus Sutra. Tanaka also strived to make Buddhism more part of the daily lives of people, more oriented toward the nuclear family, and less about funerals and memorial rites. One way he tried to do this was by creating a Buddhist wedding ceremony. He wrote, 'Because it is imperative to ... recreate a healthy religious consciousness and healthy religious customs, I created a religious (*shūkyō*) wedding ceremony' (Jaffe 2001: 171). This was a significant innovation, as weddings in Japan were traditionally not religious ceremonies.

Although priests in established Buddhist sects were slow to reform their authoritarian structures, they continued to quickly support state policies, particularly those that protected their own interests. In 1935, for example, Buddhists priests endorsed a police crackdown on so-called 'evil cults,' most of which were new *kami*-based movements that were growing in popularity. As Japan's government in the 1930s became more dominated by militants, Buddhist leaders served them by providing rationales to support the war. The established sects came to share an orthodoxy

known as 'Imperial-way Buddhism' (*kōdō Bukkyō*), which promoted the idea that the emperor was the essence of the state and that Buddhism should serve him.

The primary purpose of 'Imperial-way Buddhism' was to protect and expand Japanese state power. Traditional Buddhist goals, such as the liberation of sentient beings, were at best secondary concerns. Individual sects made even their own Buddhist teachings subordinate to emperor ideology. A group of leading Nichiren priests who called themselves 'The Association for the Practice of the Imperial-Way Buddhism' wrote that 'the principal image of adoration in Imperial-way Buddhism is not Buddha Shakyamuni who appeared in India but his majesty, the emperor, whose lineage extends over ten thousand generations' (Victoria 1997: 84–5). In a similar show of support, Nishi Honganji stated in a pamphlet that 'The Shin sect ... takes the Law of the Sovereign as its basis, teaching to reverently and faithfully follow imperial commands without question. Therefore, should there be any who commit high treason, Amida would also exclude them from salvation' (ibid.: 85). Some even went further, claiming that killing in war was a compassionate act. In the book *The Buddhist View of War* (*Bukkyō no sensōkan*), published in 1937 when Japan was at war with China, two Zen Buddhists wrote that the Japanese had 'no choice but to exercise the benevolent forcefulness of "killing one so many may live"' (Ives 2009: 35).

In addition to rhetoric, Buddhist leaders also provided armaments. Buddhist organizations raised funds among their members to support the war effort. The Rinzai Zen temple Myōshinji donated to the military two fighter planes, while Nishi Honganji raised enough money to donate at least 20 such planes, which were named Honganji-gō after the temple (ibid.: 43).

Yet their words and weapons were not enough; the government required Buddhist sects to do more. The Ministry of Education, which housed the Bureau of Religions, forced Buddhist sects to consolidate their orders (*ha*) so that the state could more easily regulate and use them. Tendai, Shingon, Rinzai Zen, and Nichiren sects, which each had multiple orders, all complied, reducing the total number of Buddhist orders by half, from 56 to 28 (Garon 1997: 85). Scriptures regarded as not in accordance with the imperial way were suppressed. The government ordered both Nichiren and Shin sects to alter their scriptures, which they did. As the war situation grew more desperate, the government compelled temples to relinquish bells and other metal objects to support military efforts. In addition to all this, by war's end over 4600 temples were destroyed due to enemy firebombings (Kasahara 2001: 586).

Postwar religious freedom: How it harmed and helped different buddhists

Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945 marked the end of an old era and the beginning of a new one. Shortly after the war's end, US forces entered Japan as occupiers. Allied

forces led by the US commander General MacArthur and his headquarters, commonly known as SCAP, governed the country for several years. During the occupation, which ended in 1952, SCAP enacted numerous new laws in an attempt to make Japan more democratic and to prevent a resurgence of a military regime. With regards to religion, SCAP's primary goals were to disestablish Shinto from the state and to establish religious freedom.

During the war, the government strictly regulated religions and could legally disband any religious group it decided was not in accordance with the imperial way. To legitimate jingoistic policies and promote nationalism, the wartime government financially supported certain Shinto shrines and rites, particularly those connected with the emperor and the war dead. Compulsory visits to shrines were seen more as patriotic acts than religious ones. To end the use of Shinto for nationalistic purposes, SCAP on December 15, 1945 issued the Shinto Directive, which abolished 'governmental sponsorship, support, perpetuation, control and dissemination of state Shinto.' Then in November of the following year, a new constitution was written that 'guaranteed to all' freedom of religion and prohibited the state from compelling anyone to participate in religious activities or from giving any public money to 'any religious institutions or association.' This allowed the most expansive legal religious freedoms in Japanese history.

Although the new laws guaranteeing freedom of religion benefited some religious organizations and allowed for activities that had been oppressed by the state, they had unintentional adverse consequences for large Buddhist organizations. The new Religious Corporations Ordinance, for example, enabled many temples to secede from their sectarian organizations in the immediate postwar period. These secessions reduced the size of those organizations and resulted in their losing wealth to temples that declared their independence.

For large Buddhist temples, the legal change that would have the most devastating consequence was land reform. SCAP's stated purpose of the reform was to 'remove the economic obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies, establish respect for the dignity of man, and to destroy the economic bondage' of farmers. Landowners were required to sell to the government at a set price their farmland in excess of 2.5 acres. The government then resold up to 2.5 acres to farmers at a reasonable rate (Woodard 1972: 227). When writing the land reform, the consequences it would have for religious institutions were hardly considered. Yet once the reform was implemented, temples suffered financial hardship because it removed a major source of income. Many temples had extensive land holdings. The proceeds from the lands were used to pay for the temples' upkeep and activities. After land reform, this source of income could not be readily replaced. By 1947 many Buddhist leaders were in dismay. In January 1947 a Buddhist editorial stated that 'we Buddhists are facing the fifth great threat – indeed we are on the brink of

disaster.' And another wrote in July 1947, 'Next year Buddhism will find itself in its darkest days' (ibid.: 200).

As bad as the financial situation looked in 1947, it became even worse for rural temples as a result of urbanization. From 1950 to 1975 the percentage of the populace living in urban areas increased from 38 to 76 percent (Shibata 1979). This demographic shift meant that many no longer lived in the places where their family temple had been for generations. As rural temples lost parishioners, it became difficult to maintain them or for their clerics to make ends meet.

In contrast to the older established organizations, the new religious freedoms were a boon for new Buddhist movements. Most of the new religious movements that formed from the mid nineteenth century to the end of World War II were *kami*-based Shinto ones. In the postwar period, however, new lay Buddhist movements, particularly those based on the Lotus Sutra, flourished. The most successful of these were Risshō Kōseikai and Sōka Gakkai, which have millions of members today. Although rivals, they had much in common: Both were founded in the 1930s, but started to grow rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in cities; both regarded the Lotus Sutra as the highest Buddhist scripture and recited it as part of their daily practice; both conducted activities for world peace; and both shifted during their times of rapid expansion from an organizational structure in which new members would join the group of the person who introduced them to the religion to a structure based on region of residence. Yet in terms of their histories and practices, they diverge considerably.

The history of Risshō Kōseikai begins with Niwano Nikkyō, a onetime milkman who attracted early followers with his divination abilities, and Naganuma Myōkō, a shamanic woman. They founded the organization in 1938 after they both left another new Lotus Sutra-based movement called Reiyūkai. From Reiyūkai, which has hundreds of thousands of members today, they retained an emphasis on ancestor veneration. Like many Japanese homes, Risshō Kōseikai members have Buddhist altars for their ancestors. Japanese who belong to traditional Buddhist sects often put rice offerings before these altars and commonly have priests come to their homes on the anniversary of a relative's death to chant a scriptural text before them. For Risshō Kōseikai members, however, priests are unnecessary, and laypeople chant parts of the Lotus Sutra before the altar daily. Another important practice of Risshō Kōseikai that has attracted many is its group counseling (*hōza*). Members gather frequently, often more than several times a month, in small groups. While sitting in a circle, people share their problems, often those related to health issues or personal relationships. They then commonly receive guidance based on Buddhist teachings from leaders and others on how they might deal with those problems. The *hōza* are said to help all those who participate realize their Buddha nature.

More successful than Risshō Kōseikai or any other modern religion in attracting new members was Sōka Gakkai. It was founded in 1930 by an elementary school

teacher named Makiguchi Tsunesaburō. The Sōka Gakkai affiliated itself as a lay organization with the small dogmatic sect of Nichiren shōshū. During the war, Makiguchi and his close disciple Toda Jōsei were imprisoned because they refused to comply with a government mandate to enshrine in their homes a talisman from Ise Shrine. In 1943 the government disbanded the religion and the following year Makiguchi died in prison. Toda, upon his release in July 1945, started to reestablish the organization. Under Toda's leadership, Gakkai members vigorously proselytized and the membership grew quickly. Before Toda's death in 1958 the Gakkai claimed it had increased its membership to more than 750,000 households. In 1960 Ikeda Daisaku became the Gakkai's top leader. No religious leader in Japan over the next five decades would wield more influence – he expanded the Gakkai membership into the millions; founded the third largest political party, Kōmeitō; founded schools and two universities (including Soka University of America in California); founded a large art museum; published over 100 books; and received over 300 honorary degrees, a world record. In recent years, since the Gakkai split with Nichiren shōshū in 1991, the organization has emphasized the mentor–disciple relationship between Ikeda and Gakkai members. Members commonly read Ikeda's writings to find guidance on how to deal with personal problems. They also read Ikeda's writings during monthly discussion meetings (*zadankai*) in each other's homes. During *zadankai* members study the teachings of Nichiren and give testimonials, typically on how the Gakkai's teachings or members have helped them. Their most basic daily religious practice includes reciting a mantra praising the Lotus Sutra – *namu myōhō renge-kyō* – before a scroll that has the same phrase written on it. Members claim that their recitation practice helps not only to bring about a 'human revolution' to make them better people but also can bring them this-worldly benefits, such has having better relationships and improving their financial situations. The teaching of prosperity through Gakkai practice no doubt seemed especially true for many new members whose family incomes drastically increased during Japan's rapid economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s.

New paths for engaging with society

Although decades passed before Zen and other Buddhist organizations apologized for supporting the war, many did call for repentance (*zange*) right after it. To rectify their previous support of militarism, which they came to see as a mistake, they began to advocate for a new popular cause – world peace. To do this, many joined the international World Fellowship of Buddhists, which since its founding in Sri Lanka in 1950 has *inter alia* worked to establish peace and assist those who have suffered the consequences of war. On the domestic front, Buddhist organizations old and new worked for peace by opposing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and opposing a bill

proposed by leading politicians to nationalize the Yasukuni Shrine, where those who died fighting for Japan were apotheosized. They also fought to keep article 9 of the constitution, which states, 'the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation.'

Another popular cause taken up by the established sects was discrimination against people known as *burakumin*, of whom there are one to three million. *Burakumin* were (and are) discriminated against because their ancestors during the Tokugawa period had occupations regarded as polluting, such as butchery and leather tanning in which dead animals were handled. Buddhist priests had a long history of using discriminatory language and of giving pejorative posthumous names to such people, which were included in temple records. Companies that wanted to avoid hiring *burakumin* or families who wanted to prevent relatives from marrying a *burakumin* could contact a temple to find out whether a person's family lineage had any *burakumin* in it. Although discrimination against *burakumin* was already being denounced in the early twentieth century by some priests, it was still a major problem after the war. Buddhist sects from the mid 1950s started setting up committees and publishing articles to combat discrimination. As a result, pejorative names were removed from gravestones, and priests stopped providing information on parishioners' backgrounds.

The effort to end discrimination was largely due to external pressure from advocacy groups for the *burakumin*. Internally, Buddhist priests and young lay leaders were more concerned with reconstructing and revitalizing their organizations as their number of active parishioners dwindled. Beginning in the 1960s – when Japanese were moving to cities, becoming much wealthier, and when extended families were becoming more fragmented – Buddhist sects wanted to engage the laity with temple activities and to change perceptions of temples as just places for rites for the dead. Some examples of these revitalization movements are Shin's 'Brotherhood movement' (founded 1961), Sōtō's 'Association of Faithful Supporters of Sōtō Zen' (1963), Nichiren's 'Defend the Dharma Movement' (1966), Jōdo's 'Hand-in-Hand Movement' (1967), Shingon's 'Palms Pressed Together Movement' (1967), and Tendai's 'Light up Your Corner Movement' (1969). These moments tended to emphasize sectarian founders, individual faith and worship, proselytizing, and the development of new leaders. Overall, their purpose was to move beyond the old system based on extended family households (*ie*) and make sectarian organizations more suitable to postwar society (Covell 2005: 44–5; Kashiwahara 1990: 273–80).

Temples also looked for ways to attract more visitors who would help financially support them. One strategy they used was to work with companies in a way that would promote visits to temples and that would have financial benefits for both the temples and the companies. Temples, particularly rural ones, for example worked with travel agencies and bus companies to promote pilgrimages (some on traditional pilgrimage routes, others newly created), to attract visitors (Reader 2006, 2007). Another strategy

has been to develop new rites for this-worldly benefits to address concerns based on new technologies and lifestyles. For example, as more Japanese started to own cars, 'purification' rites for automobiles were developed for traffic safety. As the elderly portion of the population grew and more attention was given to problems of senility and long periods of dependence, some temples began to advertise themselves as places that could prevent senility or help with a quick, painless death (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 53–60; Wöss 1993).

One of the most controversial new rites that reflected social change after the war was *mizuko kuyō*, or memorial services for fetuses that died due to abortion or natural causes (LaFleur 1992; Hardacre 1997). Abortion became widely practiced in Japan after it was legalized in 1948. Although memorial rites for stillbirths and infants who died had a long history, *mizuko kuyō* for aborted fetuses only started to become a popular practice in the 1970s when temples devoted to it emerged. Women who typically request *mizuko kuyō* may do so to avoid supernatural retribution (*tatari*), to assuage guilt, to show remorse, or to care for a child they never had. Although the rite has found patrons, many temples refuse to perform it, and the large ones that do often face criticism for exploiting women and for not upholding Buddhism's denunciation of killing (Anderson and Martin 1997; Tanabe 1994). Another type of memorial rite, which is less controversial and became popular in the late twentieth century, is that for pets who have died (Ambros 2010).



Figure 3.1 Mizuko Jizō statues decorated with pinwheels and flowers are seen at a Buddhist temple in Tokyo

While temples have provided many new ways to engage the population, since the mid twentieth century the Japanese have most commonly visited temples and interacted with Buddhist priests on three occasions. The first is at New Year's. During the first several days of January, more than half the population will visit a Buddhist temple or Shinto shrine to pray for good fortune and protection in the coming year. Patrons will typically give a small donation, many will buy new talismans for the coming year, and some will pay to have a priest perform a ritual prayer (*kitō*) for them. The second is at times of uncertainty, when people are likely to visit a temple that specializes in this-worldly benefits such as health, profit in business, or prevention of accidents. The third and most common reason, as previously mentioned, is at times of funerals for friends, colleagues, and relatives. Even if a person showed no interest in Buddhism during his or her life, at the time of death it is customary to ask a Buddhist priest to perform the funeral and then subsequent memorial rites, which are held during the first 49 days after death, then on the first, 'third' and 'seventh' anniversaries (the later two are actually held two and six years after the date of death), and sometimes on later anniversaries.

Problems for Buddhism in the early twenty-first century

The most influential event for Japanese religions since at least the end of the occupation period was an act of terrorism by Aum Shinrikyō, a religious organization founded in 1987 that understood its doctrines as primarily Buddhist (Reader 2000). On the morning of March 20, 1995 Aum released poisonous gas on Tokyo subways, killing 11 people and making thousands of others sick. The police and others claimed that constitutional protections given to religious organizations allowed Aum to carry out its atrocity. The public was outraged. Leading politicians called for a crackdown on religious groups. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party saw it as an opportune time to weaken their political opponent Kōmeitō, which received most of its support from Sōka Gakkai. In December of that year, over the strong opposition of Buddhist organizations, the government made legal changes that allowed for greater supervision of registered religious organizations. For example, they had to start reporting their financial transactions annually. While the Aum incident impacted all religious organizations, new religious movements, including Buddhist ones, have suffered the most. It fueled the anti-cult movement in Japan and fed the perception that new religions are dangerous, making it more difficult for non-traditional Buddhist organizations to attract new members.

A second problem that currently affects traditional Buddhist organizations involves the priesthood, which is now largely a hereditary occupation. Today more than 80% of all Buddhist priests are married and their wives are partners in the running of temples, albeit often unacknowledged ones (Kawahashi 1995). Priests

expect one of their sons, usually the eldest, to take over their temple when they retire or die. (If there are only daughters, one of them will often be asked to marry a priest to take over the temple.) This inheriting of a temple only became a pan-sectarian custom in the modern period after priests were allowed to marry. The sons of priests, however, frequently prefer to pursue other careers and become priests only out of family obligation. While there are still plenty of Buddhist priests, the fact that the vast majority of them come from temple families is not conducive to the long-term health of Buddhist institutions because not only does it limit the type of men who become priests but it also fosters a negative public perception of temples as family businesses (Covell 2005).

The most serious problem for priests today, however, is the challenge to their centuries-old role as ritualists for mortuary rites. Many Japanese like to say that they are born Shinto because it is customary to take newborns to shrines; that they marry Christian because of the popularity of Christian-style weddings, which are seen as more romantic than those of Shinto or Buddhism; and that they die Buddhist because a priest will perform their funerals. Traditionally, Japanese have had a priest from their family temple perform their funeral rites and have paid the priest a hefty charge for posthumous names (*kaimyō*; *hōmyō*). But in recent decades as people have moved away from their family temples and see less of a need to obtain posthumous names for their relatives, they have been less inclined to rely on priests at their ancestral temples. In urban areas in particular it is becoming common to rely on funeral companies, which often hire priests who do not know the deceased nor develop a relationship with the deceased's family. There has also been a rise in the number of people who hire no priests at all. Millions of members of Sōka Gakkai today conduct funerals without any priests. And since 1990 the Grave-Free Promotion Society has promoted funeral rites that do not require priests, posthumous names or cemeteries (Kawano 2010; Rowe 2003). This move away from relying on priests to handle mortuary rites has the potential to seriously weaken the financial and social strength of institutional Buddhism in the years ahead.

Although Buddhism faces serious problems, the history of Buddhism in modern Japan indicates that it has continually dealt with crises and found ways to persevere. At times its future looked as dim or dimmer than it does now in the early twenty-first century. Dedicated Buddhist leaders and laypeople throughout the modern era worked frantically to keep it alive through tidal waves of national political turmoil and altered it in response to shifting social currents. They occasionally found niches in which they could flourish for a time. Yet Buddhist leaders of all types, despite their ardent searching, never found a comfortable place to sit in modern Japan for long. Today, their search for such a place continues.

Summary

- Japanese will often visit Buddhist temples at New Year's, at times of crisis, and for mortuary rites, but commitment to traditional Buddhist institutions today is weak.
- During the Meiji period (1868–1912) Buddhism was disestablished from the state, of which it had been a part in the Tokugawa period (1603–1867), and was attacked by ideologues who favored a national type of Shinto to support a system of government center around the emperor.
- Buddhist institutions supported the state and militarism during World War II.
- Legal changes made after the war, such as land reform, posed challenges for traditional Buddhist institutions, while new religious freedoms helped new lay Buddhist organizations.
- In the 1950s and 1960s lay Buddhist movements, particularly Risshō Kōseikai and Sōka Gakkai, grew exponentially as the economy rapidly expanded.
- Buddhist priests tried to adapt to social changes in the latter half of the twentieth century by advocating for new causes, engaging the laity, and developing new rites.
- Buddhist organizations today face challenges as a result of the Aum incident, issues related to the priesthood, and due to people finding new ways to perform mortuary rites.

Discussion points

- How did the different strategies used by Buddhists to adapt to new social situations complement and conflict with each other?
- How did Western countries influence the development of Buddhism in modern Japan?
- How did wider social changes influence the development of Buddhism in modern Japan?
- On the basis of the history of Buddhism in modern Japan, what theoretical claims might we make about how religions change?
- How is the history of Buddhism in modern Japan presented in this chapter? What is emphasized? What is left out? How might we present its history differently?

Further Reading

Covell, S. (2005) *Japanese Temple Buddhism: Worldliness in a Religion of Renunciation*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaiʻi Press.

On the basis of ethnographic and historical research, this book examines the Tendai sect and provides the best overview in English of traditional organized Buddhism in contemporary Japan.

Covell, S. and Rowe, M. (2004) (eds) 'Traditional Buddhism in contemporary Japan,' special issue of *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 31(2).

A collection of essays that deals with different issues, including civil society, Buddhist NGOs, ascetics, and new mortuary rites. Available online at: http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/publications/jjrs/

Davis, W. (1992) *Japanese Religion and Society: Paradigms for Structure and Change*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

A collection of essays by a sociologist of religion. Chapter 5, 'Buddhism and modernization.' provides an overview of Japanese Buddhism in the Meiji period in a way that engages with Weberian scholarship.

Ives, C. (2009) *Imperial-Way Zen: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique and Lingering Questions for Buddhist Ethics*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

Chapter 1 gives an up-to-date historical overview of Buddhism in Japan from 1868 to 1945.

Jaffe, R. (2001) *Neither Monk nor Layman: Clerical Marriage in Japanese Buddhism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

While focusing on the debates surrounding clerical marriage in the Meiji period, this book provides fascinating historical details on issues that concerned traditional Buddhists as Japan began to modernize.

Ketelaar, J. (1990) *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

An in-depth historical study that shows how and why Buddhism was persecuted in the Meiji period and how Buddhists responded.

Reader, I. (1991) *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

An excellent introduction written in an engaging style. A must-read for all students of Japanese religions.

Reader, I. and Tanabe G. (1998) *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

This book shows on the basis of ethnographic, historical, and doctrinal research how concerns with gaining benefits are at the core of much of Japanese religious practice, both Buddhist and Shinto.

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4 Buddhism in China and Taiwan

Gareth Fisher

Chinese Buddhism in the Early Modern Era, 1898–1949

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the challenges posed to Buddhist institutions and practices in China were considerable. The first of these challenges came from Buddhism's efforts to recover in the aftermath of the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), the product of a charismatic Christian-inspired movement whose followers sacked Buddhist monasteries and burned scriptures throughout a significant part of southern China. The second challenge came from a series of reform-minded intellectuals: Profoundly impacted by China's negative encounters with Western military might in the nineteenth century, these reformers believed that traditional forms of Chinese religiosity had an ossifying effect on Chinese social organization and had contributed in part to what they perceived as the country's backwardness. Some of the reformers singled out Buddhism in particular as a tradition concerned only with the mindless recitation of rituals for the deceased for which its allegedly indolent clergy earned their living. Buddhism also came under attack by Christian missionaries who, supported by Western forces, proselytized aggressively in China throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These missionaries accused Buddhists of being indifferent to the suffering of the living by retreating from society instead of actively reaching out to help the poor.

The toppling of China's last dynasty, the Qing, and the establishment of China's first modern state, the Republic of China, in 1912 enabled the reformers to put many of their policies into practice. Following a secularization model derived from the West, they offered religion a protected space in the realm of private belief and in private institutions, but aimed to remove it from the public sphere (Goossaert 2008: 209; Ashiwa 2009: 52). All legitimate 'religions' were expected to conform to a 'church-like' institutional model that included distinguishing their temples and mosques from popular religious sites and their professional clerics from popular religious communities (Goossaert, op. cit.: 215–28). This attempt to compartmentalize and regulate posed significant challenges to both religious institutions and popular religiosity in China. Throughout Chinese history, most popular worship practice combined elements from Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, and other folk religious traditions. Before the modern era, few lay believers would have identified themselves as exclusive adherents to a Buddhist tradition. Even professional clerics, for whom the distinctions among China's different religious traditions were more meaningful, frequently combined their resources to provide ritual services to local cults and residential communities. Both the notion of 'religion' as an isolated social institution or mode of private belief and the notion of 'religions' as distinct and incommensurable entities was completely at odds with the traditional Chinese worldview. Nevertheless, under the modern Republican regime, aspects of religiosity that fell outside of authorized religious categories, such as shamanic practices, fortune-telling, divination, and many other localized rituals or temple-based festivals, were subject to

the label of 'superstition' (*mixin*). Campaigns aimed at the eradication of superstitious practices sprang up throughout the early Republican period, most notably in the first few years of the Republic and then again during the early years of the Nationalist Party (*Guomindang* or *Kuomintang* [KMT]) rule in the late 1920s (Duara 1991: 75). These campaigns were precursors to much more significant attacks against an even wider range of religious practices by the later communist government.

Facing challenges from both the devastation of religious infrastructure during the Taiping Rebellion and the regulating practices of the Republican state, practitioners of Buddhist-based religiosity, both lay and monastic, responded in four specific ways: First, like the adherents of other officially sanctioned religions, Buddhist practitioners worked to establish 'national associations' to which local monasteries, temples, and Buddhist orders would be affiliated in a hierarchical order (Goossaert 2008: 215). Buddhists hoped that affiliation with a national organization would help individual Buddhist religious sites to establish credentials of legitimacy before local or national authorities who might otherwise seek to convert their facilities to government use. The second response came from Buddhists who aimed to reform the *saṅgha* from within. The most famous and influential of these modern reformers was the Ven. Taixu (T'ai Hsü, 1890–1947). Like many of Buddhism's critics from outside the *saṅgha*, Taixu believed that Buddhism had deteriorated into a religion concerned solely with death and the dead. Unlike some of these outside critics, however, who saw no hope for the Buddhist tradition, Taixu found in Buddhist scriptures an untapped potential for the teaching of ethical action in the living world. In the interests of harnessing this potential, he developed the influential concept of 'Buddhism of Living People' (*rensheng fojiao*), through which he aimed to direct Buddhists to compassionate action in this world. In response to the criticisms of Christian missionaries, he foresaw a strong role for Buddhism in establishing charitable associations and activities along the model of Christian organizations (and also in competition with them; Welch 1968: 129; Tarocco 2007: 37). He also believed that monasteries should be collectively owned by their resident monks rather than privately owned by their abbots (Ashiwa 2009: 56) and advocated the reform of temples from places of ritual worship to centers for the study of Buddhist philosophy and the practice of meditation (Pittman 2001: 95). Taixu also worked hard to establish a series of national academies for the study of Buddhism (*fo xue yuan*) following a regulated model where elite monastics would verse themselves in Buddhist scholarship as well as in more general subjects necessary to their roles as educated citizens (Welch, op. cit.: 110–16; Birnbaum 2003: 436; Ashiwa, op. cit.: 56). Taixu struggled to bring many of his reform projects to fruition, however: Many of his associations and schools were short-lived and lacked the support of more 'conservative' clergy who were alarmed at his efforts to radically transform Buddhist institutions (Welch, op. cit.: 55–65, 67–71). Nevertheless, many of Taixu's

reform ideas had a significant influence on the later development of Buddhism in China, most particularly in Taiwan.

The third and fourth responses of the Buddhist community to modern challenges came in the building up of Buddhist institutions. The third response involved the establishment of Chinese Buddhist communities overseas, often in Chinese diaspora communities (Ashiwa and Wank 2005), and increased contacts between Buddhists in China and self-identified Buddhists elsewhere, both by nationally established figures such as Taixu and by the leaders of lesser-known but regionally-significant monasteries (Welch, op. cit.: 55–64, 160–83; Ashiwa, op. cit.: 55-57; Nichols 2010). The fourth response came from growing groups of organized lay Buddhists who were committed to propagating the Dharma. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, affluent lay Buddhists established publishing houses in several major cities, most notably Nanjing, Hangzhou, and Shanghai, that were devoted to the reproduction of Buddhist scriptures (Welch, op. cit.: 3–10; Tarocco, op. cit.: 41–63). The main goal of these lay Buddhists was to replace those scriptures that had been destroyed during the Taiping Rebellion. Other publishing houses were formed within large temples. A large number of Buddhist periodicals emerged, many featuring essays on Buddhist thought by well-established lay Buddhist intellectuals. Eager to propagate the Dharma and gain merit, lay Buddhist groups paid for the printing of Buddhist texts and then distributed them free of charge both within temples and in other public places such as train carriages (Tarocco, op. cit.: 28). Lay Buddhists also participated in elaborate 'life rescue' (*fangsheng*) activities in which they purchased and then released live animals sold in the market. They often carried out these rituals in very public, visible places such as on the sides of open fishing waters (Welch 1967: 379–82). Lay Buddhists incorporated themselves into lay Buddhist associations and established vegetarian restaurants (Welch 1968: 75–81). They were also active in charitable activities such as the establishment of orphanages and schools, in the reform of prisoners, and in disaster relief efforts (Welch 1967: 377–8; 1968: 121–31; Tarocco, op. cit.: 28). Through both the spread of Buddhist literature and public displays of ritual, Buddhist laypersons challenged the views of certain state reformers that Buddhism was a redundant tradition with no vital role to play in the building of a modern society. However, both the public activities of an emerging laity and the establishment of ties with overseas Buddhists contributed to the formation of a Buddhist identity that was unique to the modern period and closely aligned with the state's notion of what a modern religion should be.

By the 1930s, Buddhism in its form as a modern world religion began to find favor with the state. As war with the Japanese intensified, large public Buddhist rituals to pray for the peace and welfare of the nation became common and popular. The state sought to harness these rituals, some of which were performed by Tibetan Buddhist figures such as the Panchen Lama, to strengthen national unity. Buddhist apologists

within the state hierarchy, such as Dai Jitao (1890–1949), aimed to use Buddhism to emphasize a basic commonality between all of China's minority groups. The state was particularly interested in drawing Tibet into a modern Chinese nation-state: This involved convincing the Tibetan people that they were part of a single nation with China unified under a Buddhist religion (Tuttle 2005).

The state continued to support Buddhist activities well into the 1940s, but by this time, many monasteries had been damaged or converted to military rule as a result of, first, the Chinese war against Japan and, later, the civil war between the Nationalist party and the insurgent communists. Gaining the support of most of China's people, especially the rural poor, and taking advantage of a weak and war-ravaged state, the communists won victory in 1949. The nationalist party (and many prominent Buddhist leaders) retreated to the island of Taiwan off China's southeast coast. The period following the end of the hostilities marked another transition for Buddhism in China.

Buddhism in Taiwan (1949–)

Prior to the end of the civil war, the population of Taiwan was composed mostly of descendants from China's southeast Fujian and Guangdong provinces along with a small percentage of 'aboriginal' peoples of Austronesian origin. Moreover, the island had until recently been under direct Japanese rule. The influx of mainlanders retreating from the civil war added significant instability to Taiwanese life. Concerned to assert its authority and order, the Nationalist government quickly declared martial law on Taiwan, a declaration that was not lifted until 1987. Into this climate came a large number of prominent refugee monks, who brought with them the Buddhist Association for the Republic of China (BAROC) originally established on the mainland but now reconstituted in Taiwan's capital, Taipei. Authorized as the only legitimate representative of Buddhism before the state, the BAROC represented the interests of the *saṅgha* in restoring many temples for religious use (Jones 1999: 169–75). It was also active in representing Chinese Buddhists in global Buddhist associations, making it useful to a state interested in developing strong overseas alliances (ibid.: 161–8).

By the late 1970s, the ruling Guomindang had begun to loosen its grip on everyday life in Taiwan. Similarly, the BAROC's monopoly on institutionalized Buddhism began to wane and organized Buddhist movements started to encroach on its turf (ibid.: 178–83). The most notable of these organizations was the Fo Guang (Buddha light) order (also known as Fo Guang Shan; founded in 1967) and its lay arm, the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA; founded in 1992) established by the Ven. Xingyun (Hsing Yun; 1927–). Following the example of Taixu, Xingyun advocated a this-worldly form of Buddhism that emphasized the importance of assisting others in everyday life by teaching ethical values and engaging in charitable activities (ibid.: 185–98).



Figure 4.1 The Fo Guang headquarters near Kaohsiung in Taiwan

Another major Taiwanese Buddhist organization to have developed in the contemporary period is the Buddhist Compassion Merit Relief Society (*Fojiao Ciji [Tzu Chi] Gongde Hui*). The Ven. Zhengyan (Cheng Yen; 1937–), Ciji's founder and charismatic leader, also draws much of her inspiration from Taixu's concept of *rensheng fojiao* (ibid.: 205). Zhengyan was inspired to found Ciji after two impressionable experiences as an early nun. The first occurred when she was visiting a sick disciple at a nearby hospital: An aboriginal woman had bled to death of a miscarriage when her relatives had been unable to afford her medical care and her blood remained on the hospital floor. The second was an encounter with two Catholic nuns who encouraged Zhengyan to convert to their faith because, as they explained it, Catholics were active in charity work to help the poor and Buddhists were not (an argument that echoed missionary criticisms of Buddhism throughout the modern period). Zhengyan inspired her lay followers to contribute a small percentage of their daily grocery money to help poor persons to defray their medical expenses (ibid.: 203–4). From its humble beginnings, by 2000 Ciji would grow to a membership of (according to its own statistics) five

million (Huang 2003: 136) and to amass US$342 million in charitable contributions (Jones 2009). It has opened two hospitals in Taiwan and contributes to disaster relief work around the world. Ciji also exemplifies the growing role of women in Taiwanese Buddhism, the only place in the world where nuns outnumber monks. Not only is Ciji's charismatic leader a woman, but women dominate rank-and-file membership and leadership positions within the organization (Huang 2009: 66–77, 167–74, 196).

Both Ciji and the Fo Guang order represent the most modern faces of Chinese Buddhism. As a monastic order, Fo Guang Shan has emphasized many of Taixu's original reformist goals: systematization of the training process for monastics, the abolishment of private monastic lineages, and the establishment of strong ties with Buddhists overseas. Both Fo Guang Shan and Ciji place strong emphasis on the importance of compassionate action in this world rather than preparation for the next. In their support and establishment of charitable organizations, both Fo Guang Shan and Ciji mirror the concerns of Christian missionaries and function as a response to their criticisms. The uniqueness and visibility of these organizations has made them the subjects of several studies by western scholars (Huang and Weller 1998;



Figure 4.2 The Hall of Still Thoughts at the Ciji Foundation's headquarters in Hualian, Taiwan

Chandler 2004; Laliberté 2004; Madsen 2007; Huang 2009), but it is worth noting that both organizations put together represent only a fraction of practicing Buddhists on Taiwan. The Taiwanese state never suppressed popular religious practices with the severity of the mainland communist government. Buddhist-inspired practices such as devotion to the *bodhisattva* Guanyin (Kuan-yin) and the Buddha Amitabha (*Amituofo*) remain entwined with popular religious practices and are very visible in Taiwanese religious practice today (see Weller 1987).

Buddhism in Mainland China: Repression then Revival (1949–)

In some respects, conditions for Buddhists on the mainland, at least in the initial post-war stages, shared similarities with those on Taiwan: Both communities of Buddhists suffered the destruction of religious sites and their conversion to non-religious uses during the war. Both governments instituted land reform policies that turned a portion of temple lands over to the peasants who had previously paid rent to work them (Jones 1999: 146). The Nationalist government, like the communist government, made aspects of Buddhist religiosity the target of anti-superstition campaigns. Yet significant differences still existed, differences that made the practice of Buddhism much more challenging in mainland China than on Taiwan: First and foremost, Buddhists on mainland China lacked an association that truly represented their interests to the state. While BAROC was connected to the Taiwanese authorities, it could also represent Buddhist interests, as when it advocated the return of monasteries to religious use. The Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA), however, which was established on the mainland in 1953, existed only to carry out the agenda of the state, even when it caused Buddhists to abandon religious activities and violate their precepts (as in the campaign to assist China in the Korean War; Ji 2008: 245). Secondly, the mainland's policy of land reform was much more sweeping (and bloody) than that on Taiwan. Many monasteries saw nearly all of their lands redistributed to the peasants who had worked on them. This meant that they could no longer collect rents to support the livelihood of the resident clergy, many of whom were forced to return to lay life. Thirdly, the communist government carried out campaigns against superstition with a breadth and severity not seen under the relatively weak Republican state. The targets of these campaigns included all Buddhist-inspired popular worship practices that did not fall under the rubric of Buddhist institutions (Welch 1972: 233–4).

Rooted in the Marxist belief that religion was both a symptom and symbol of oppression, the communist party followed the lead of the Soviets in heavily regulating religion and either co-opting or persecuting (often brutally) many of its leaders. Yet the party-state stopped short of banning religious practice altogether. This restraint stemmed from belief on the part of communist leaders such as Mao that forcibly

banning religious practice was wrong (MacInnis 1972: 8–13). Mao believed that if the conditions for social repression were alleviated, religious adherents would voluntarily abandon their religious practice since they would no longer have need of it. The state was particularly wary of attacking religious organizations in 'minority' areas, including in Tibet where it still hoped to gain favor. Moreover, like its Taiwanese counterpart, the mainland government aimed to use religion, especially Buddhism, to establish ties with overseas regimes and to counter claims that it was persecuting religious adherents (Welch 1972: 169–210).

By the late 1950s, however, communist persecution of religion in general and Buddhism in particular had grown more aggressive. Rising discontent in minority areas, most notably Tibet, led communist authorities to take more direct control of Tibetan religious institutions (Goldstein 1998: 8–9). The same period also saw a ratcheting of campaigns against those, labeled as 'rightists,' who did not follow the party's strict political script. Many Buddhist clergy fell into this category, and the campaign was used as an excuse by some to persecute religious followers and ransack religious sites (Welch 1972: 65, 235–6; Qin 2000: 142). The anti-rightist campaign paled in comparison to what would later follow in the 1960s, however, when an aging Mao declared his Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Resentful at being sidelined from political power following the failure of his most aggressive campaigns to fast-track China's transition into a communist society, Mao declared that China's revolution was unfinished: Echoing early modern intellectual reformers but in a far more radical way, Mao appealed directly to the Chinese people to destroy the 'four olds' (*si jiu*), Old Customs, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Ideas, which he argued were preventing China from evolving out of its backward feudal past into a modern communist future. Heeding Mao's call, mobs of youths became organized as 'Red Guards' (*hong wei bing*). The Red Guards took on the task of destroying anything that remained of China's 'old' society, including all religious practices, which were now – ironically – lumped into the same category of 'superstition' from which an earlier modernist campaign had aimed to divide them. All organized religion was effectively replaced by a cult to Mao, who was adulated as a messianic figure. All religious associations were disbanded, and the public practice of religion became, for all intents and purposes, illegal. Religious activities remained largely non-existent or invisible on the mainland for the better part of the next two decades.

Mao died in 1976, the year that most scholars give to mark the official end of the Cultural Revolution. By this point, the Chinese people had grown weary of constant government campaigns. After a brief power struggle, the Cultural Revolution was officially condemned and four leaders (including Mao's wife Jiang Qing) were made into scapegoats for the conflict in an effort to deflect wider criticism from the party. Deng Xiaoping, who had been demoted during the Cultural Revolution, took power and put into place a series of liberalization policies that paved the way for a

relaxation of restrictions on religious practice. As part of a revised 1982 constitution, the party-state issued Document No. 19, which re-established the freedom to practice five authorized religions, including Buddhism, provided that these practices were confined to approved 'religious activity centers' (*zongjiao huodong changsuo*) (which, in the case of Buddhism, meant certain temples and monasteries) or to private activities in adherents' homes (MacInnis 1989: 8–26). Document No. 19 even permitted the restoration of religious sites that had been destroyed during the Maoist period, though it lacked specifics as to which sites should be restored or what the extent of the government's obligation would be in restoring them.

Buddhism grew slowly throughout the 1980s but accelerated in popularity during the 1990s and 2000s. This growth in Buddhist practice can be attributed to four major factors. The first two are largely the result of actions *outside* of the *saṅgha* while the latter two stem from activities internal to it: The first and initial factor was the re-popularization of Buddhism in the media. As Ji Zhe (2011: 33–5) discusses, the 1980s saw an increase in Buddhist signs and symbols in popular culture. This presence of Buddhism in the media included television programs set in China's dynastic periods that featured Buddhist monastics as central or supporting characters and *gongfu* (Kung Fu) movies that glorified the tradition of martial arts within Buddhist monasticism. The 1980s also saw a revival in the study of Buddhism as an academic subject by Chinese scholars. Vegetarian and Chan meditation groups also cropped up on many college campuses. The second factor has been direct state investment in the reconstruction of Buddhist temples and monasteries for the purposes of economic development (Qin 2000: 152; Weller and Sun 2010: 39; Ji, 2011: 36–7). In keeping with the pragmatic character of Deng's reform policies, local officials are often unconcerned about the 'superstitious' character of religious practice if it can be used as a means to earn money. These officials aim to restore destroyed temples, and even to construct completely new ones, to bring in tourists and pilgrims alike who will spend their money both at the temples and also in surrounding areas (Ji, op. cit.: 36–7).

The third and fourth factors stem from growth within the Buddhist community that has occurred following the initial re-opening of temples and the re-establishment of certain lay and monastic communities. The third factor is an emphasis on temple reconstruction within the Buddhist community itself: While some projects to reconstruct particular temples begin as the initiatives of local officials (Weller and Sun 2010: 37), others are initiated by clergy and lay patrons within the Buddhist community (Fisher 2008). Clergy invested in these construction projects also impress upon lay followers the meritorious effects of investing in temple reconstruction and renovation. Through the investments of these lay patrons, the *saṅgha* is not solely dependent on state patronage. The fourth factor is growth in the availability of free Buddhist media within the temples themselves. Just as lay Buddhists in the Republican



Figure 4.3 A recently constructed temple complex near Beijing aims to attract tourists and pilgrims alike

period were motivated to reprint Buddhist scriptures following their destruction in the Taiping Rebellion, so too are Buddhists in the contemporary period concerned to restore literature destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Some of this initial impetus for restoration came from Chinese Buddhists in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other countries (Fisher 2011: 57). In recent years, however, members of the growing Buddhist community on the mainland have contributed their own efforts to the printing of Buddhist texts, art, and the reproduction of DVDs or CDs containing the lectures of famous masters.

In spite of its significant growth, however, the Chinese *saṅgha* is still only around 20% of its size during the Republican era (Ji 2010; Laliberté 2010), and political obstacles to continued growth remain. For the most part, temples are expected to be economically self-sufficient: Because of this, many clergy are forced to spend much of their time performing rituals for fee-paying laypersons, often at funerals or other rituals to placate the deceased. Government bureaus (and, less often, the clergy themselves) frequently impose temple entrance fees, which sometimes exclude



Figure 4.4 Laypersons line up to receive copies of a free Buddhist book at the Temple of Universal Rescue (Guangji Si) in Beijing

less affluent worshippers. The government also places restrictions on the number of new clergy that can be ordained in both Han Chinese and certain minority areas.

While Taixu had rejected a Buddhist preoccupation with death and the afterlife, these remain the predominant concerns of many practicing Buddhists in mainland China today. Many of these Buddhists identify with the Pure Land (*jingtu*) school and pay homage to Amitabha Buddha to seek rebirth in his Paradise of Western Bliss (*xifang jile shijie*). Many mainland Chinese, especially those of an older generation (who make up the majority of practitioners today, including new converts), have experienced a lifetime of struggle, conflict, and uncertainty, and take comfort in the notion that there is a benevolent being who will accept them into a blissful afterlife. This orientation to the afterlife does not mean that Buddhists today are unconcerned with this-worldly affairs, however. A significant percentage of Buddhists I encountered both in Beijing and in other parts of China spoke out against what they perceived as a moral decline in contemporary Chinese life. Specifically, they are concerned that the unbridled pursuit of material wealth has become the sole preoccupation of most

Chinese today exclusive of any ethical framework. They believe it is crucial that as many Chinese as possible convert to Buddhism so that they can learn once again to adopt a spirit of compassion and generosity in their dealings with others.

Plurality and mobility: the Future of Chinese Buddhism?

In his discussion of the failure of the BAROC to keep all Taiwanese Buddhists under its wing, Charles Jones (1999: 218) notes that, since Shakyamuni Buddha first refrained from naming his successor, Buddhists have been inclined to both institutional and philosophical plurality. While the visions that reformers like Taixu had of a more closely unified *saṅgha* were partially realized in both mainland China and Taiwan, the systematization of Chinese Buddhist practice probably reached its apex during the middle of the twentieth century. At present, it is slowly reverting to a more historically common pluralism. As we have seen, in Taiwan today a wide range of Buddhist institutions and popular practices flourishes, and there are few if any political restraints on the further pluralization of Buddhist institutions. While Buddhism in mainland China remains officially under the auspices of the CBA, there are significant cracks in this control: Private ordinations of both monastics and laypeople are quite common; lay practitioners' associations and Buddha-recitation halls (*nianfo tang*) are emerging sometimes in not-yet-authorized religious spaces; and many clergy receive payments for ritual activities directly from their lay patrons, reducing their dependence on government-sanctioned Buddhist institutions for support. Some Buddhist clergy have no official connection with temples at all, living in private quarters near monastery complexes (Makley 2007: 266) or in retreat at small mountain temple sites (Porter 1993; Birnbaum 2003: 445). While the explosion of popular Buddhist media is supposed to be confined to approved temples, it frequently finds its way into other public places: Buddhist bookstores give away certain materials for free, and pamphlets and tracts are 'accidentally' left on public buses.

In Taiwan, members of Fo Guang Shan and Ciji have expanded beyond the confines of their small island to establish overseas branches. They frequently enter into dialogue with Buddhists in other countries, as when Fo Guang Shan recently sponsored the ordination of would-be female monastics in the Theravāda tradition (Cheng 2007: 50–1). Their work to establish overseas branches involves both Ciji and Fo Guang Shan in the globalization of Chinese Buddhism and Taiwanese identity (Chandler 2004: 264–72, 286–300; Huang 2009: 217–66). However, instead of exporting a monolithic form of religion patronized by the state for the purposes of domestic political legitimation, they spread highly diverse aspects of Buddhism to the world.

Highly mobile and translocal practitioners also have a significant influence on the development of Buddhist revival in mainland China. With their movements and associations no longer as confined as they were during the Maoist era, these



Figure 4.5 Incense, Emeishan

practitioners move about the country (and in some cases the world) spreading their particular versions of Buddhist teachings. Many use their travels to distribute either originally written or reproduced Buddhist literature (Fisher, 2011: 69–71). As I explained in the section on literature distribution, Buddhist practitioners have also renewed their contacts with overseas Buddhist organizations, some of whom have contributed substantial resources to the revival of Buddhism on the mainland. Ease of movement across the country also means that members of minority communities are no longer confined to their home areas and minority Buddhist practices are no longer for the sole consumption of minorities. In recent years, many Han Chinese Buddhists have traveled to Tibetan Buddhist areas. Likewise, Tibetan Buddhist monks have left Tibet and traveled to eastern parts of China where they have succeeded in gaining converts and followers among Han Chinese (Tuttle 2005: 222–3). Other minority Buddhists have used the practice of Buddhism to form transnational connections which enable them to both preserve their cultural and religious traditions and to form identities other than those of peripheral minorities in a larger nation-state. Both Thomas Borchert (2008) and Sara Davis (2005: 57–60, 64–73) have written about how the 'minority' Dai-lue in southwest China use Buddhist temples as centers in the cultural preservation of the endangered Dai-lue script and, more generally, as nodes in the distribution of Dai-lue culture among Dai-inhabited regions of Burma, Thailand, and China. In the 2008 uprising against Chinese rule, Tibetans in China, many of them monks, made use of cell phones to coordinate their protest efforts both across the country and with Tibetans outside of China in a manner that would have been unimaginable a short while before.

As in many other Asian countries during the twentieth century, forces both within and outside of the Chinese *saṅgha* have combined to create a category of Buddhism as a space of legitimate religious practice within a modern nation-state. In this way, Buddhism in China has become linked to a global category of Buddhism as a world religion. Of all aspects of Chinese modernity that have impacted Buddhists, it is this sense of connection with an imagined global Buddhist community that has had the most lasting effect. Prior to the modern period, far fewer of those Chinese who combined elements of Buddhist religiosity into their personal spiritual practices would have identified themselves as Buddhist. Even in being Buddhist they would not necessarily have identified themselves as belonging to a global religious community of which China is one part. Yet practitioners of Chinese Buddhism today often take great pride in self-consciously taking on this identity. At the same time, however, they have varying conceptions about what being Buddhist means, as well as a greater ability to spread those unique conceptions to a wider and wider audience. If the twentieth century featured the emerging consciousness of a 'Chinese Buddhism,' perhaps the twenty-first will feature the emergence of 'Chinese Buddhisms,' religiosities that, like their pre-modern counterparts, are highly diverse, but that are now far-reaching as well as highly localized. These Chinese Buddhist religiosities will be harder and harder to fit into a single religious system or institutional order.

Summary

- Beginning from the end of the nineteenth century, modernizing Chinese regimes have aimed to create a specific category and space for ‘religion,’ including ‘Buddhism.’ This has led to the regulation, restriction, and, in some cases, the banning of forms of Buddhist religious practice.
- Faced with the threat of restrictions on their activities, Buddhists living in China’s first modern republic:
  - formed associations to protect their right to practice religion;
  - aimed to reform and modernize their own institutions;
  - established contacts with overseas Buddhists to legitimate their activities;
  - spread the teachings of Buddhism by writing, reproducing, and distributing Buddhist literature and participating in public religious activities.
- In 1949, following a long civil war, communist forces gained power and established the People’s Republic of China. The losing side in the war, the Nationalist party, fled the Chinese mainland and established a ruling authority on the island of Taiwan.
- In the initial years of Nationalist rule on Taiwan, Buddhism was highly regulated. Since the late 1980s, however, the government has lifted restrictions on religious organizing and new, modernist Buddhist organizations such as Fo Guang Shan and the Buddhist Compassion Merit Relief Society have flourished.
- In mainland China, the communist state first regulated Buddhist practices, then restricted them, then banned them altogether. Beginning in the 1980s, the state has slowly lifted its restrictions and the Buddhist community has revived. Factors in the re-growth of Buddhism include:
  - an increase in the visibility of Buddhism in the popular media and its renewed legitimacy as a subject of academic study;
  - direct state involvement in the reconstruction of Buddhist temples and monasteries destroyed during previous campaigns against religious practice;
  - an investment in temple reconstruction by Buddhist lay patrons;
  - the spread of Buddhist literature and Buddhist-themed media in temples throughout the country.
- After passing through a period of intense regulation and restriction, Buddhism in globalizing Taiwan and mainland China is now becoming more pluralistic again, but practitioners of Buddhist-type religiosity have a stronger identity as Buddhists than their counterparts in pre-modern times.

Discussion points

- Why did modern reformers in China look unfavorably on Buddhist religious practice?

- In what ways did attempts to establish national associations strengthen Buddhism? In what ways did they weaken it?
- Do you agree with the reformer Taixu that Buddhism should have a greater orientation to this world? Is the concern of Buddhists with performing rituals for the dead a corruption of the religion's true form?
- Why was the spread of popular Buddhist literature an important part of Buddhism's revival in both the Republican and post-Maoist periods?
- Why do you think that Taixu's teachings have had more influence in Taiwan than in mainland China? Do you think that, as Buddhism continues to grow in mainland China, Buddhist groups in China will become similar to those in Taiwan or will they proceed down a different path?

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5

Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism

Sarah Jacoby and
Antonio Terrone

Tibetan Buddhism's meeting with modernity

Tibet in the early twentieth century is often depicted as isolated and uninterested in any form of change or progress, despite the significant modernization efforts Tibetans made at this time, spearheaded by the thirteenth Dalai Lama Tupten Gyatso (1876–1933) and some members of the Tibetan aristocracy. After Tibet's defeat by the British forces led by Lieutenant Colonel Sir Francis Edward Younghusband in 1904, the thirteenth Dalai Lama, in conjunction with Dasang Damdul Tsarong (1888–1959) and other government officials, initiated a broad-scale modernization effort including building up the Tibetan army, developing agricultural technology, and creating a post office and bank. After the fall of the Manchu-controlled Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) in which Tibet had been subsumed, the thirteenth Dalai Lama declared Tibet an independent country. He sought to create communication avenues between Tibet and the outside world by installing a telegraph system and sending a number of aristocratic boys to be educated in England as well as opening an English school in the central Tibetan town of Gyantsé for them (Tsarong 2000; Kapstein 2006: 172). However, despite these genuine attempts to modernize Tibet, conservative factions within the Tibetan government, especially monastic elites, resisted these changes for fear that foreign influences were anti-Buddhist and would threaten their monopoly on power. The Gelukpa monastic establishment had profound influence over the Tibetan government and succeeded in convincing the Dalai Lama to devalue modernization and militarization, and in 1925 he closed the newly launched progressive projects (Cabezón 2008: 263–4; Goldstein, 1997: 35).

Tibet's Buddhist ideology, however, was not only a source of anti-modern sentiment; it also served at times as a bridge between Tibetan and Chinese ethnicities. Leaders of Republican China (1911–49) led by Sun Yat-sen chose a 'soft path' to attempt to gain control of Tibet, offering Tibetans the option to spontaneously choose to become part of the new modern Chinese nation-state. Influenced by this ideology were not only the Republican policymakers, but also several Chinese Buddhist thinkers who started to consider Buddhism as a world religion and therefore advocated a discourse of modern nation-state inclusive not only of Chinese Buddhists, but also of Tibetan Buddhists. In an attempt to win Tibetan loyalties, political leaders in Republican China thus focused on the promotion of a shared Buddhist heritage. As a result, for almost two decades from the early 1930s to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Tibetan Buddhism became very popular in China (Tuttle 2005).

With the fall of Republican China and the rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, it quickly became clear that modernization was not an option for Tibetans any more, but rather an urgent necessity. In 1951, only two years after his rise to leadership, Mao Zedong (1893–1976) officially claimed sovereignty over Tibet. The PRC imposed the 'Seventeen-Point Agreement for a Peaceful Liberation of Tibet,' marking the end of the 40 years of *de facto* independence that Tibet had enjoyed since



Figure 5.1 The Tibet Peaceful Liberation Monument, unveiled in Lhasa in 2007

the 1911 fall of the Qing Dynasty. The almost decade-long Chinese 'Peaceful Liberation' (Ch. *heping jiefang*) of Tibet ended in 1959 with the departure of Tibet's spiritual and secular leader, the fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso (1935–) for India, the land that was not only sacred to Tibetans for being the homeland of the Buddhist religion, but that would also become a second home to some 80,000 Tibetans who escaped along with the Dalai Lama from the new Communist authority.

The transition from a tradition-laden Tibetan society to the new reality of Chinese-led modernity was not an easy one for the Tibetans. Although some of the major points in the Seventeen-Point Agreement guaranteed respect for the Dalai Lama's rule in Tibet and for a policy of 'freedom of religious belief' in which 'the religious beliefs, customs, and habits of the Tibetan people shall be respected,' these promises proved hollow (Goldstein 1989: 765–6). The sudden departure of the Tibetan leader after the large-scale uprising of Tibetans against Chinese rule in March of 1959 escalated into violence and resulted in a change of heart on the part of Chinese policymakers. Abandoning their former gradualist approach to win Tibetans' loyalty, they implemented harsh policies aimed at demolishing all opposing forces. They severely attacked Tibetan Buddhist institutions, depriving monastic compounds of their estates and their economic and political powers in all of the three regions of Tibet including Central (Ütsang), Western (Ngari), and Eastern Tibet (Kham and Amdo). Tibetans not only found themselves without their leaders, but they were also prohibited from practicing religion in both their public and private lives. Chinese authorities also cracked down on other forms of traditional Tibetan customs, beliefs, dress, and social mores, thereby stripping Tibetans' sense of cultural identity of its major elements.

Marxist-Leninist theory of class struggle and the application of socialist ideologies adopted and adapted by Mao Zedong became the new paradigm for Tibetan social life. Under the ploy of abolishing the old system of society in order to pave the way for modern development, all of China, including Tibet, underwent a large-scale purge of everything reminiscent of feudalistic (Ch. *fengjian*) behavior, imperialist influences, and sociocultural backwardness. The situation in Tibet further deteriorated when Mao Zedong's disastrous Great Leap Forward (Ch. *da yue jin*) involving agricultural collectivization led to mass starvation in both China and Tibet, followed by the dramatic decade of the Cultural Revolution (Ch. *wenhua dagemin*, 1966–76). Under the intoxicating effects of Maoist dogmas, during the Cultural Revolution the Red Guards destroyed nearly all of the more than 6000 monasteries in Tibet, stripping ancient temple walls of centuries-old sacred paintings and statues. As they dismembered Tibet's religious landscape of its holiest reliquary stūpas, shrines, and temples, they traumatized millions of people and killed countless others. The material culture of Buddhist Tibet was severely depleted. Many of the religious and artistic items that managed to survive the raids were smuggled out of Tibet only to reach the southern coasts of Hong Kong and enter private collections and museums around the world.

Buddhism in Tibet since the Chinese reforms

Regulations on religion in Tibet

With the end of the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, a new era of 'reforms and opening' (Ch. *gaige kaifang*) began under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping (1904–97). This policy shift involved a softening of the Communist rhetoric against religion and a new emphasis on market-run economy, foreign trade, and technological development. After the Chinese Communist Party Secretary Hu Yaobang's fact-finding mission to Lhasa in 1980 to examine the real conditions of Tibetans, he concluded that Tibet was in urgent need of reforms and advocated that an increase of state funds be allocated to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (Goldstein 1997: 63–5). After recognizing the failure of its previous policies in Tibet, the Chinese Communist Party initiated liberalization reforms that allowed expressions of Tibetan culture such as wearing traditional clothes, rehabilitating many former aristocrats and intellectuals, and reintroducing Tibetan-language education in schools. In terms of religion, the reforms permitted monasteries to re-open and sponsored their buildings to be restored and rebuilt. Expression of religious belief was allowed in Tibetan households and to some degree in monastic institutions as well (Barnett 2010: 326).

Religious freedom is officially protected by the constitution of the People's Republic of China. However, religion in Tibet is in fact highly regulated, due in part to its associations with Tibetan nationalism. The prohibition instituted in the 1990s against displaying any photographs of the Dalai Lama in public or private exemplifies this tension between nationalism and Buddhist devotion in Tibet. Party leadership tends to demonstrate lenience and liberal attitudes towards some popular forms of religious practice and belief among Tibetans in the countryside, at the same time as it strictly controls the religious activities of Tibetan students and urban state employees as well as educated, especially monastic, religious elites who lead official religious institutions. Besides banning Dalai Lama photos, restrictions on religious practice in Tibet include close government regulation of monasteries, tight restrictions on the growth of monastic populations, prohibitions against the enrollment of novice monastics under 18, prohibitions on worship by students and public officials including teachers, and in some cases prohibitions on the display of religious prayers on buildings and natural landscapes.

Indicative of split opinions within the Communist leadership regarding policies pertaining to Tibetan and other ethnic nationalities (Ch. *shaoshu minzu*) in China, policy towards Tibetan Buddhist practice vacillates between tolerance and repression and is subject to sudden crackdowns if Chinese authorities believe Tibetans are threatening the legitimacy and territorial unity of the state (Rossabi 2005). Religion, traditional education, and language remain sensitive in Tibetan areas of China and are recurrent flashpoints for unrest and protests that are often violently suppressed by Chinese

security forces. Hardline approaches to solving Sino-Tibetan tensions continue to elicit support among some Chinese leaders. Tolerance for Tibetans' expressions of religious belief dissipates immediately when authorities suspect the involvement of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and his 'splittist' activities (Ch. *fenlie huodong*) among Tibetans in China.

In 2001 the Larung gar Buddhist Academy in the Eastern Tibetan region of Serta (part of Kandzé Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture or TAP in Sichuan) was targeted by the Sichuan United Work Front under the suspicion that its founder and then leader Khenpo Jikmé Püntsok (1933–2004) was loyal to the Dalai Lama. Security personnel from the Public Security Bureau (PSB) and People's Armed Police forced thousands of resident monastics, including both Tibetan and Han Chinese, to leave the complex and then demolished hundreds of their quarters. The following year, the same fate occurred to the Tibetan Buddhist master and visionary Drupwang Lungtok Gyeltsen's (1927–2011) Yachen gar Buddhist Center in Tromtar (also part of Kandzé TAP) under a related pretext. These have been the largest crackdowns on specific religious institutes in Tibetan areas in the last 30 years.

Under Jiang Zemin and more recently President Hu Jintao, government policies on Tibetans in China have been characterized by strict regulation in conjunction with a rhetoric of social harmony and patriotism aimed at maintaining constant pressure on Tibet to adapt to socialist ideology. Stability maintenance (Ch. *weiwen*) as advocated by President Hu Jintao specifically emphasizes new social and crisis management mechanisms to pacify unrest and reduce 'complicating factors' when addressing separatist forces working for East Turkistan independence and Tibet independence ('China's National Defense in 2010,' http://news.xinhuanet.com). Stability maintenance is of particular concern after widespread riots ricocheted around the Tibetan plateau in 2008 that coincided with China's much-anticipated Olympic year. Within the space of one month in March–April 2008, Tibetans initiated over 95 separate protests, which led to widespread arrests and in some cases violence (Barnett 2009). Catalysts for the 2008 protests include high levels of unemployment among Tibetan youth and dissatisfaction with China's rule over Tibet despite the massive influx of the PRC's investment in economic development in Tibet under the 'Great Opening and Development of the West' campaign (Ch. *xibu da kaifa*). Since 2008, there has been an increase in state control, military presence, and restrictions on religious institutions and practices in Tibetan regions. Exacerbating this crackdown, the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the political dissident Liu Xiaobo, and the 2011 pro-democracy uprisings in the Middle East prompted online campaigns calling for a Chinese 'Jasmine revolution.' Under these premises, state control oversees the organization and practice of religion for both official systems (Daoism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam) and semi-official or underground (Ch. *dixiae*) religious congregations.

Buddhist revival in Tibet

Unique features of Tibet's Buddhist devotion are 'mass monasticism' as well as large religious communities inspired by charismatic lay Buddhist leaders. 'Mass monasticism' is an appellation describing the religio-political structure of Tibet prior to the arrival of the PRC, when Tibet's high population of Buddhist monks played important roles in the administration of religious and political power (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998: 15; Goldstein 2009). Buddhist monasticism represented the central pillar of Tibetan religious culture and literary production. With the Chinese takeover, this traditional ideology was dismantled. Since the liberalization reforms of the 1980s, the rebuilding of monasteries has been sanctioned in Tibetan areas. However, monasteries are under the attentive control of local authorities, many of whom are convinced that large monastic complexes fuel separatist activities. As a result, authorities have forced many monastic leaders to assert their loyalty to the Chinese state and have imposed patriotic education campaigns on monastic residents. A case in point is the current situation at Kirti Monastery in Ngawa, Sichuan Province. Demonstrations broke out on March 16, 2011 to celebrate the third anniversary of the widespread protests that shook Tibet in 2008, during which a monk immolated himself to death and several more have since self-immolated as an act of protest. In response, local authorities have cracked down in the area, causing a serious and ongoing standoff between authorities and Tibetans, both monastic and lay.

Nevertheless, during the past 30 years since China's liberalization policies began in Tibet, a resurgence of monasticism has flourished in Tibet. Since the early 1980s several Tibetan Buddhist monastic leaders and monks have raised funds from Tibetan and Chinese donors to rebuild monasteries and retreat centers, reconstitute monastic curricula, and train a new generation of monastics. The process of religious reconstruction has been constant but slow, as a consequence of the departure of many elite religious figures to India where they live in exile, the continual control of local authorities, and deterring religious policies. However, despite the reconstruction and revitalization of monastic activities, most Tibetan Buddhist monasteries have never been granted full autonomy to reconstitute the traditional monastic institutional system, way of life, or forms of education and learning that they maintained in pre-1959 Tibet (Cabezón 2008: 266).

Buddhist monasteries in Tibet, just like many temples and monasteries across mainland China, have to earn their own revenues to finance their activities and maintain their resident monastic population. One of the largest income sources for monasteries in pre-1959 Tibet was leasing land. With this no longer an option, in the new market economy most monasteries generate their income from sources including performing collective rituals and ceremonies, as well as offering public teachings. In addition, donations from both domestic and foreign devotees and revenues gained from tourist activities are important sources of income for monasteries. This is one



Figure 5.2 The Potala Palace in Lhasa

of the most innovative aspects of present-day Buddhist development in China and Tibet, often earning monasteries the appellation of 'money-making machines' (Yin 2006: 86).

Along with the resurgence of monastic institutions in Tibet after the reforms instituted by Deng Xiaoping, other forms of Tibetan Buddhist culture have also flourished, in particular the religious encampments (*chögar*) in Eastern Tibet. Religious encampments date to the fourteenth-century activities of the fourth Karmapa Rangjung Dorjé (1340–83), who was the leader of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism (Thub bstan phun tshogs, 1993: 55–7). They were mobile communities comprised of both monastic and non-monastic disciples and centered around charismatic religious leaders, often visionaries or Treasure revealers (*gter ston*).

Religious encampments have been particularly resilient despite ongoing religious restrictions in Tibetan areas due to their less organized enrollment structure, which made them less susceptible to direct state intervention and allowed them to concentrate on traditional forms of education without the consistent intrusions

of patriotic re-education campaigns and other types of state control that have affected monastic education. Some present-day religious encampments have become extremely large and renowned, attracting not only many thousands of monks and nuns, but also Chinese and Tibetan laypeople. Pre-eminent examples include Larung gar, Yachen gar, and Lungön gar, all based in eastern Tibetan areas within Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces of the PRC. These encampments have become major centers of learning, including both rigorous curricula from multiple sects of Tibetan Buddhism and a strong focus on contemplative practice. In addition to re-establishing these forms of traditional religious education that predate Chinese intervention, some religious encampments' training also incorporates modern subjects such as computer literacy and the study of Mandarin Chinese and English.

One distinctive feature of religious encampments in comparison to monasteries is the presence of charismatic leaders known for their visionary capacities, called Treasure revealers (Germano 1998; Terrone 2008). Among the several Buddhist mountain retreats and religious encampments across Eastern Tibet approximately 15 to 20 were founded and led by religious figures who claim to be Treasure revealers, including well-known ones such as Larung gar, Achö gar, Nyelung gar, Lungön gar, and Ösel Chöling. Treasure revelation is a uniquely Tibetan form of Buddhist revelation involving the discovery of religious artifacts and scriptures that many believe were hidden by prominent figures during the Tibetan Empire (seventh to ninth centuries). Most often Tibetans understand the source of these Treasures to be the teachings of Padmasambhava, the eighth-century Indian Tantric master credited with converting Tibet to Buddhism. The primary qualification for being an authentic Treasure revealer is to be a reincarnation of one of Padmasambhava's original 25 disciples (Thondup 1986). Through a complex and multi-stage process, Treasure revealers who lead thriving contemporary religious encampments such as Larung gar, Yachen gar, and Lungon gar have revealed their own distinctive cycles of teachings, rituals, and liturgies.

Given the revelation tradition's strong associations with the golden age of Tibet's Imperial dominion, Treasure revealers and their rediscovered teachings have played a central role in the reconstruction of Tibetans' sense of religious and national identity in the wake of the traumas caused by Tibet's inclusion into the PRC in the mid twentieth century. As a result of technological advances in communications, media, and transportation, news of revelations by Buddhist masters can be immediately documented, printed, and circulated in a fashion impossible just a few decades ago. Printed materials about Treasure revealers, autobiographies, propaganda pamphlets, and even websites are increasing the visibility of these masters exponentially, thus expanding their territory, congregations, and financial resources (Terrone 2010). Treasure revealers and their encampments have attracted the avid interest of not only Tibetan devotees, but increasingly large numbers of Han Chinese devotees of Tibetan Buddhism.



Figure 5.3 Panoramic view of the nun's quarters in the eastern Tibetan religious encampment called Yachen Gar in Tromtar, Kandzé Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, PRC. Photo by Antonio Terrone, November 2004.

These factors suggest that, although visionary movements have always been an important aspect of Tibetan Buddhism, they are finding renewed relevance in post-reform Tibetan areas of the PRC, in particular in Eastern Tibetan regions that make up parts of Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunan, and Gansu Provinces. One can view these developments as a response to Chinese government restrictions on monastic enrollment and education that have led to the rise of non-monastic forms of religious organization and lineage continuation.

Han Chinese investment in Tibetan Buddhism

Since the beginning of the reform era under Deng Xiaoping after the Cultural Revolution, Tibetans have contributed large amounts of labor and income to rebuild temples, monasteries, and shrines in their local areas. Additionally, since the early

1980s, an increasing number of Chinese devotees from mainland China, Taiwan, and Singapore have become interested in Tibetan Buddhism and have become major donors (Terrone 2008; Birnbaum 2003; Germano 1998). With the emergence of a new Chinese middle class, an increased demographic mobility, the gradual relaxation in terms of ideological control of the population, and a growing tourist campaign to promote Tibet as an exotic destination, more and more Han Chinese travel to Tibetan areas and many embrace Tibetan Buddhism as their new religion. Chinese interest in Tibetan Buddhism has proved beneficial to both parties. On the one hand, many Tibetan Buddhist masters travel to mainland China to offer teachings and empowerments and to lead meditation sessions and communal rituals (such as 'life release' or Ch. *fang shen*/Tib. *tshe thar* rituals) in several coastal and inland cities and towns as well as conduct summer retreats and teachings in their own monasteries in Tibet where groups of Han Chinese practitioners can enjoy Tibetan culture and landscapes. On the other hand, Han Chinese devotees contribute enormously to the development of Tibetan Buddhism by providing large quantities of material and financial support to Tibetan communities via donations to Tibetan teachers. Han Chinese devotees have funded the restoration and building of monasteries, temples, chapels, and other religious sites. Additionally, Chinese devotees' tourism to Tibet leads to improvements in local Tibetan infrastructure such as guesthouses, restaurants, and Internet cafés (Terrone 2009).

Chinese interest in Tibetan Buddhism rests not only in the realm of personal devotion, but also in politics. In 2007 the PRC announced that the state would control the selection procedure of reincarnated Tibetan lamas. Among the most distinctive and sacrosanct features of Buddhism in Tibet, the reincarnation system traditionally operates through the activities of close disciples of the deceased religious figure, who engage in a complex process involving visions, divinations, astrological calculations, and tests aimed at the investiture of the appropriate young person, often a child, as a religious and institutional successor to their previous master. Some of the most important figures in the Tibetan Buddhist world such as the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama, and the Karmapa are *tülku*s, or reincarnated lamas who have been selected according to such a process. Scholars interpret Chinese government involvement in Tibetan ecclesiastical succession as a strategic maneuver to involve Chinese authorities in the selection of important Tibetan religious figures including the future reincarnation of the Dalai Lama (Barnett 2011). There is historical precedent for non-Tibetan governmental involvement in selecting Tibetan reincarnations, such as the 'golden urn' lottery system put in place by the Qing Dynasty's Qianlong Emperor in 1792, although Tibetans avoided its use whenever possible (Kapstein 2006: 159). Much more recently, in 1995 the PRC government arrested a young Tibetan boy named Gendün Chökyi Nyima, whom the Dalai Lama had selected to be the new Panchen Lama incarnation. Gendün Chökyi

Nyima has not been seen or heard from since, while the Chinese government has appointed their own selection of the Panchen Lama in his stead. Precedents such as these have set the stage for future PRC involvement in the selection process of the next Dalai Lama, although the current Dalai Lama's recent actions are likely to complicate Chinese officials' plans.

The Dalai Lama and the Tibetan community in exile

As the theocratic polity of Tibet headed by the Geluk institution of the Dalai Lama was being dismantled under the tide of socialist transformation, the Dalai Lama crossed the Indo-Tibetan border accompanied by a handful of cabinet ministers, armed fighters, and Buddhist masters who were all seeking refuge from the political turmoil in Tibet. Welcomed by Jawaharlal Nehru, then the first Prime Minister of independent India, the Dalai Lama entered what was soon to become his adopted country. Thanks to the sympathies of the Indian government for the Tibetan cause, the Tibetan refugees were given the opportunity to settle in Dharamsala in the foothills of the Dhauladar mountain range in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh in an area that was once a summer hill resort for British officers. In 1959 the Dalai Lama founded the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), also known as the Tibetan Government in Exile (*btsan byol bod zhung*). Within the first year alone from 1959 to 1960, approximately 80,000 Tibetans crossed the Himalayas to follow the Dalai Lama and seek asylum in India and Nepal. According to some estimates, between 1000 and 2000 'new arrivals' (*gsar byor pa*) pour into these countries from Tibet every year. Many of these refugees walk for many days without suitable outdoor gear over dangerous snow-engorged Himalayan passes in an effort to avoid being stopped by Chinese border patrol agents. Of these new arrivals, many leave behind their families, homes, and villages for the hope of meeting the Dalai Lama, and the dream of returning one day to a free Tibet. Others, especially children and young people, cross the border to seek a better education and take advantage of more job opportunities. With more than 80 Tibetan schools founded in the Tibetan exiled communities of India, Nepal, and Bhutan since the early 1960s, many parents in Tibet send their children into exile to study in hopes that they can receive a proper Tibetan education. In 1972 the Tibetan government in exile created the Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) through funding by a large network of international NGOs, assistance from the Government of India (GOI) and individual donors. In 2009 the Dalai Lama inaugurated the first Tibetan college in India, called 'The Dalai Lama Institute for Higher Education,' located near the south Indian city of Bangalore.



Figure 5.4 The fourteenth Dalai Lama

Religion and politics in exile

Since the 1980s the Dalai Lama has advocated a 'Middle Way Approach' to solving the Sino-Tibetan conflict. An explicitly Buddhist approach to conflict resolution, the Middle Way Approach derives its name from the Buddha's first sermon, in which he described his teaching as the middle way between the extremes of asceticism and

self-indulgence (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* 56:11). Instead of seeking full independence for Tibet, the Middle Way Approach seeks genuine national regional autonomy for the three traditional provinces of Tibet including Ütsang, Kham, and Amdo. Genuine autonomy would mean that Tibetans would exert control over the internal affairs of Tibet relating to issues such as religion, culture, education, economy, health, and environment via a democratically elected government, while the PRC would control Tibet's international relations and defense. According to the Dalai Lama, this policy offers 'mutual benefits to China as well as Tibet,' in the form of safeguarding Tibetan interests in the protection of their culture and Chinese interests in maintaining their territorial integrity (http://www.dalailama.com/messages/middle-way-approach). The Dalai Lama's Middle Way Approach joined his Five Point Peace plan, which includes:

(1) transforming the three provinces of Tibet into a zone of peace
(2) stopping China's policy of incentivizing Chinese population transfer into Tibet
(3) respect for Tibetan people's human rights and democratic freedoms
(4) restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment
(5) initiation of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples

(http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/five-point-peace-plan).

Since the Dalai Lama issued a statement about the Five Point Peace Plan in 1987 before the US Congressional Human Rights Caucus, and about the Middle Way Approach before the European parliament in Strasbourg in 1988, the international community has responded positively to his efforts at compromise with the PRC. Nevertheless, the PRC has remained obstinate. Although negotiations have continued sporadically between representatives of the Dalai Lama's exile government and the government of the PRC, little progress has been achieved, and the PRC continues to accuse the Dalai Lama and his followers of being dishonest, privately pressing for independence while publicly calling only for autonomy, and using religion as a pretext to pursue an otherwise political agenda.

The PRC government is not the only critic of the Dalai Lama's application of the Buddhist principles of nonviolence and compassion for all sentient beings via his Middle Way Approach and Five Point Peace Plan. Though his nonviolent efforts at conflict resolution and his compromise position of seeking autonomy instead of independence for Tibet have earned him widespread global acclaim, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and the US Congressional Gold Medal in 2007, his Middle Way Approach has faced increasing criticism by Tibetans both inside and outside of Tibet. Frustrated by persistent human rights violations in Tibet and lack of progress in Sino-Tibetan negotiations, a growing number of Tibetans question the

effectiveness of the Middle Way Approach, although repeated referendums reaffirm the majority of Tibetans' support of the policy. Prominent voices unsatisfied with seeking autonomy include the Tibetan Youth Congress, which has maintained its position of seeking independence for Tibet since it was founded in Dharamsala, India in 1970. The author and political activist Jamyang Norbu has also been an outspoken critic of the Middle Way policy. His recent article 'Not the Buddha's Middle Way' argued that just as 'the Buddha never compromised on his goal of achieving Enlightenment,' so too Tibetans should not compromise on their goal of complete freedom for all of Tibet (http://phayul.com, accessed 2/1/2011).

Tibetan exile politics have recently undergone a major shift when on March 10, 2011 the Dalai Lama proclaimed his intention to retire from political office as the Head of State of the exiled Tibetan Government. In his speech to the Fourteenth Assembly of the Tibetan People's Deputies (March 14, 2011), the Dalai Lama explained his decision to devolve his political power as a forward-thinking move to bolster the strength of democratic leadership among Tibetans, saying, 'If we have to remain in exile for several more decades, a time will inevitably come when I will no longer be able to provide leadership. Therefore, it is necessary that we establish a sound system of governance while I remain able and healthy' (http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/retirement/message-to-14th-assembly). The Dalai Lama's shift away from direct political and religious leadership of the Tibetan exile population symbolizes a move towards secular democracy and away from the 'theocratic' blend of religion and politics (*chos srid zung 'brel*) traditionally upheld by the Tibetan government. In March of 2011 more than 82,000 Tibetans living across the diaspora from India to Europe and America took part in a historic election to appoint a new Prime Minister (Kalon Tripa) to be Chairman of the Cabinet as well as to elect 44 new members of the Tibetan Parliament. Prior to this election, since 2001 the Prime Minister of the Central Tibetan Administration was Prof. Samdong Rinpoche Lobzang Tenzin, a high-ranking reincarnate lama, Gandhian philosopher, and leading scholar in education and professor of Buddhist philosophy. Samdong Rinpoche and the Dalai Lama are both Tibetan monks and religious hierarchs of the Geluk School of Tibetan Buddhism, which held political authority in Tibet for much of the last 300 years. On April 27, 2011 Lobsang Sangay (1968–) was elected the new Prime Minister. A layperson and senior fellow at Harvard Law School in the United States, Lobsang Sangay exemplifies the shift away from theocratic rule by Geluk monks and towards secular democracy.

The ultimate irony of the exiled Tibetan government's embrace of secular democratic rule spearheaded by the Dalai Lama is the response it has garnered from officially atheist leaders within the PRC. The Dalai Lama himself has repeatedly stated that 'even the continuation of the institution of the Dalai Lama is for the people to decide' (Dalai Lama's March 10 statement, 1988, repeated March 14, 2011 in his speech to the Fourteenth Assembly of the Tibetan People's

Deputies, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/retirement/message-to-14th-assembly). Nevertheless, the governor of the Tibetan Autonomous Region within the PRC, Padma Choling, told reporters that 'We must respect the historical institution and religious rituals of Tibetan Buddhism ... I am afraid it is not up to anyone whether to abolish the reincarnation institution or not' (quoted in the *New York Times* article 'Dalai Lama Gives Up Political Role,' March 10, 2011). Thus the Chinese government is positioning themselves as the upholders of Tibetan tradition, while the Dalai Lama is open to a re-visioning of his present and future role. Even as far back as 1969, the Dalai Lama stated that when Tibetans govern their own people, 'The system of governance by the line of the Dalai Lamas may or may not be there. In particular, the opinion of the forward-looking younger generation will be an influential factor' (March 10th statement, 1969, repeated in his speech on March 14, 2011, http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/retirement/message-to-14th-assembly).

The impetus for China's sudden interest in preserving Tibetan tradition is not hard to see: The Dalai Lama's efforts to solidify Tibetan democratic leadership in exile without reliance on his unique position as Dalai Lama threatens to sidetrack the PRC's apparent intention to wait out the present Dalai Lama's lifetime and then control the appointment of his successor. Tibetans have reason to be concerned about China's potential involvement in the selection of the fifteenth Dalai Lama, given their recent history of appointing their own Panchen Lama and seizing the boy selected by the Dalai Lama. In spite of this, the Dalai Lama's current decision to withdraw from active political authority does not necessarily signal the end of his tenure as Dalai Lama or the end of his reincarnation lineage. Indeed, he has suggested that the next Dalai Lama could be recognized by him prior to his death as a mandé trülku (*ma 'das sprul sku* or 'before-death reincarnation') or even be popularly elected by the Tibetan people.

The globalization of Tibetan Buddhism

After the wave of Tibetan refugees began in 1959 along with the Dalai Lama's escape, Tibetan Buddhism has gradually become more widely known throughout the world. Currently approximately 150,000 Tibetan exiles have settled not only in South Asia, but increasingly in the United States, Canada, Switzerland and other European countries, Australia, and New Zealand. Along with this trans-national spread of Tibetans, Tibetan Buddhism has joined other forms of Buddhism to become a globalized religion, accessible via Internet and travelling Tibetan religious teachers throughout the world. Its newfound domains have led to substantial changes in the ways in which Tibetan Buddhism is taught and practiced outside of culturally Tibetan areas. Many of the most popular aspects of Tibetan Buddhism in its globalized form share more with features that scholars have termed 'Buddhist modernism' than they do with traditional forms of

Buddhism practiced in Tibet. Tenets of 'Buddhist modernism' that feature prominently in the new globalized form of Tibetan Buddhism include demythologization, the 'secularization' of Buddhism as a philosophy instead of a religion, a de-emphasis on ritual, image worship, and 'folk' beliefs, and a focus on Buddhism as an egalitarian religion that accords with democracy and social activism (McMahan 2008: 7). The Tibetan Buddhism that Tibetan lamas have exported throughout the world consists less of rituals propitiating the rich pantheon of divine and demonic forces that make up a sizable portion of Buddhist practices among Tibetans, and more of mindfulness training techniques. Beyond its religious applications, Tibetan Buddhist meditation has become popular internationally as a secular technique for augmenting happiness and reducing stress. After all, 'the happiest man in the world,' according to US neuroscientists, is a French-born Tibetan Buddhist monk, Matthieu Ricard, author of *Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill* (2006).

The trend toward secularizing Tibetan Buddhism began when Tibetan Buddhist teachers came from Asia to settle in America and Europe beginning in the late 1950s and 1960s. In order to make Tibetan Buddhism more palatable to those unfamiliar with Tibetan culture, Tibetan Buddhist lamas endeavored to make Buddhism accord better with the modern secular values they encountered. One of the early Tibetan Buddhist masters to bring Tibetan Buddhism to Europe and the United States was Chögyam Trungpa (1939–87), whose Shambhala Training technique was a form of meditation meant to lead one to 'a secular enlightenment' (Trungpa 1984). His prolific writings introduced many English speakers to Tibetan Buddhism, which he made understandable partly by analogizing Tibetan teachings with Western psychology. More recently as well, Tibetan Buddhist masters in the West such as Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche call for a stripping of the cultural artifacts of Tibetan Buddhism from its essence, which he asserts is mindfulness practices that work with the mind directly in realizing Buddha nature (Dzogchen Ponlop, *Rebel Buddha: On the Road to Freedom*, 2010). The Dalai Lama himself has been a leading figure in promoting Tibetan Buddhism as a system of values and a philosophy that accords with modern secular, democratic, and scientific views. He has had a lifelong interest in exploring the connections between Buddhism and science, which he has pursued in multiple conferences organized by the Mind & Life Institute based in Boulder, Colorado, in the Emory-Tibet Science Initiative, and in his recent book *The Universe in a Single Atom* (2005).

According to the Dalai Lama, the essence of the Buddhist teachings is 'Help others if you can; but if you cannot, at least refrain from harming others' (Tenzin Gyatso 1996: 166). While there is little doubt that compassion is a core tenet of Buddhism, Donald Lopez has pointed out that if this formulation is the essence of Buddhism, any physician who has taken the Hippocratic oath would be a Buddhist (Lopez 1998: 186). Lopez's comment calls attention to the potentially dangerous effects of separating

out the ‘cultural baggage’ from the ‘essence’ of Tibetan Buddhism, which runs the risk of watering down its intricacy and cultural specificity in favor of finding common ground. Since the 1960s and 1970s when the outflow of Tibetan refugees met the Hippie generation of spiritual seekers, Tibetan Buddhism has become increasingly popular in Western countries. Hollywood movies about Tibet such as ‘Seven Years in Tibet’ (1997) starring Brad Pitt and ‘Kundun’ (1997) directed by Martin Scorsese have augmented Tibet’s appeal as a spiritual and exotic ‘Shangri-la.’ Hollywood stars number among the Western Tibetan Buddhist devotees, notably Richard Gere who is a disciple of the Dalai Lama, and Steven Seagal, who received some measure of notoriety in 1997 when he was recognized as a reincarnated lama (*tülku*) by the (then) head of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, Penor Rinpoche.

Even as elements of Tibetan Buddhism become more popular in mainstream American and European culture, the gap between Tibetan Buddhists and non-Tibetan converts to Tibetan Buddhism remains wide. Non-Tibetan Buddhist converts, the vast majority of whom are non-monastic, tend to focus on meditation practices and Tantric liturgies that are most often the preserve only of monastics or other full-time religious professionals in Tibet. Alternately, ethnically Tibetan lay Buddhists tend to focus on accumulating good karma for a better future rebirth via reciting mantras, turning prayer wheels, circumambulating sacred Buddhist sites, maintaining household shrines, making periodic offerings to their family’s lama and his monastery, sponsoring rituals for deceased relatives, and celebrating Tibetan Buddhist holidays. The chasms between Tibetan and non-Tibetan Buddhist practices have led to confusion about the role and function of Tibetan Buddhist teachers, especially concerning sexual ethics within the teacher–student relationship, and financial transactions between lamas who come to the West to raise money for their home monasteries and Western disciples who don’t necessarily view their main role as patrons.

The root of these cultural misunderstandings stems from the novelty of Tibetan Buddhism in the global arena. Tibetan Buddhism is only about 50 years old in Europe and America and even newer in other regions outside of Asia. Unlike the Pāli-language Theravāda Buddhist canon that has long been translated into English, the vast majority of the Tibetan Buddhist canon remains unavailable in the English language, preserved only in classical Tibetan. Thanks to the pioneering work of E. Gene Smith (1936–2010), who collected, printed, and digitized a vast quantity of Tibetan writings under the auspices of his position at the Library of Congress and later the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC), an array of commentarial, poetic, genealogical, historical, philosophical, liturgical, doctrinal, medical, biographical, and autobiographical Tibetan literature is now available online for Tibetan language readers. Nevertheless, given that only a tiny fraction of this textual treasury has been translated into English and given that Tibetan Buddhism’s

tenure outside of Asia can still be counted in decades and not yet centuries, Tibetan Buddhism as a globally-accessible phenomenon is still in its infancy. Currently there are major projects afoot to translate the Buddha's discourses and commentaries (the Kangyur and Tengyur) that make up the Tibetan Buddhist canon, such as Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche's project titled '84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha' (http://84000.co). Translating the more than 400 volumes that comprise the Tibetan Buddhist canon from Tibetan to English could take a century to complete, but as this and many other translation projects progress, and as Tibetan Buddhist teachers and practices become more integrated into non-Tibetan social frameworks, the tradition will surely come into sharper focus around the world.

Summary

- In 1951 the People's Republic of China led by Mao Zedong assimilated Tibet into the PRC, which previously had been a *de facto* independent country after the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911.
- In 1959 the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, then spiritual and temporal head of Tibet, fled into exile in India where he established the Tibetan government in exile in Dharamsala, India. About 80,000 Tibetans fled into exile within the first year of the Dalai Lama's departure from Tibet.
- In 1980 Chinese Communist Party Secretary Hu Yaobang visited Tibet and advocated large-scale liberalization policies that permitted, among other things, the rebuilding of many of Tibet's monasteries as well as the expression of religious belief. These liberalizations ushered the way in for the revitalization of Buddhism in Tibet, spearheaded not only by Tibetans eager to rebuild their temples, monasteries, and shrines, but also by Han Chinese devotees and patrons who have become increasingly drawn to Tibetan Buddhism.
- Although religious freedom is officially protected by the People's Republic of China, in fact the state maintains a strict control over religious congregations in China and has repeatedly cracked down on Tibetan Buddhist monastic and lay congregations when authorities suspected anti-Chinese national sentiments among Tibetans, in particular loyalty to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.
- As a consequence of the Chinese government's strict control over monasteries' organization and religious education, alternate forms of religious congregation in Tibet have grown in strength and size such as religious encampments (*chögar*) led by charismatic leaders known as Treasure revealers.
- Since the early 1980s these religious encampments have become attractive centers of education and training not only for monastics of all sectarian affiliations, but also for an increasing number of non-celibate and lay devotees, both Tibetan and Han Chinese.

- In 2007, the PRC announced that the state would control the selection procedure of reincarnated Tibetan lamas, one of the most distinctive and sacrosanct features of Buddhism in Tibet. Some scholars interpret this decision as a strategy to involve Chinese authorities in the selection of important Tibetan religious figures including the future reincarnation of the Dalai Lama.
- Since the 1980s the Dalai Lama claims to have renounced seeking independence for Tibet and has instead advocated a 'Middle Way Approach' to solving the Sino-Tibetan conflict.
- In a speech to the Fourteenth Assembly of the Tibetan People's Deputies (March 14, 2011) in Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama explained his decision to devolve his political power as a forward-thinking move to bolster the strength of democratic leadership among Tibetans and promote a secularization of the Tibetan administration in exile.
- Tibetan Buddhism is becoming increasingly popular among non-Tibetans. Trends in this new globalized form of Tibetan Buddhism include a de-emphasis on monasticism, a focus on meditation, and an emphasis on the ways in which Tibetan Buddhism accords with secular ethics.

Discussion points

- Why does the Chinese Communist Party feel the need to strictly regulate Tibetan Buddhist institutions and religious practice?
- What factors have influenced the religious revival of Buddhism in Tibetan regions of the People's Republic of China?
- How did the Dalai Lama model his government in exile in India and in what ways does it accord with modern secular values?
- What is the Dalai Lama's 'Middle Way Approach,' and in what ways is it an application of Buddhist principles?
- What are the ramifications of Han Chinese interest in Tibetan Buddhism in the People's Republic of China?

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A collection of 25 original articles devoted to various manifestations of Tibetan culture, history, and religion from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century.

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This is a collection of studies focusing on the resurgence of religious practice in Tibet since the reforms of the 1980s including studies on pilgrimage, monastic organization, visionary activities, non-celibate communities, and rituals within different Tibetan areas of the People's Republic of China.

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Useful websites

www.phayul.com
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6 Modernist Interpretations of Buddhism in Europe

Martin Baumann

In the early 1960s, a characteristic debate about the nature of Buddhism took place in Germany. Felix Knobeloch, founding member of the Buddhist Society Berlin, emphatically argued for a 'German Buddhism' as a religion grounded in reason, science, and rational insight in particular. A German Buddhism would solely rest on the 'purged canon' of Pāli texts, freed from later mythological insertions (Knobeloch 1960: 21, translation by MB). The *Majjhima-Nikāya* (middle-length treatise) in the translation by Berlin Buddhist Dr Kurt Schmidt would constitute the 'bible of German Buddhism' and reveal afresh the 'original teaching' of the Buddha (ibid.: 20, 19). 'As the Koran is the fundament of Islam, the bible the one for Jews and Christians, in a similar way German Buddhists must rely on a firm basis, and this is the purged [Pāli] canon,' Knobeloch argued (ibid.: 21). This self-convinced attitude based on an exclusively cognitive and rational approach to the understanding of Buddhist ideas and practices had dominated the self-conception of most Buddhists in Germany since the late nineteenth century.

In the wake of the incipient pluralization of Buddhism in Germany and generally in Europe since the 1950s, such an approach also constituted a demonstration of authority and defense. It did not remain unanswered, however. Lionel Stützer, member of the newly established Tibetan order Ārya Maitreya Mandala, referred to other characteristics of a German Buddhism: 'There are: contentiousness, assertiveness, hairsplitting, manner of know-all, but also diligence, studiousness, and seriousness. Each of the great and meritorious German interpreters of the Buddha word purported to present the "right" reading of the teaching,' as Stützer stated (1960: 44, translation by MB). Stützer warned against claiming to represent exclusively the 'original' Buddha teaching and opted to complement the understanding of Buddhism in Germany by references to Mahāyāna ritual, practice and insight. The prevailing rational and intellectual approach would benefit from meditative, intuitive, and ritualistic elements as taught in Mahāyāna and Tibetan traditions (Stützer 1948).

This minor though telling debate, echoing previous debates between German pioneer Buddhists, points to various central issues of Buddhist modernism. Knobeloch, aspiring to speak for the majority of Buddhists in Germany, was a lay person, not a monk. Also, Stützer was a lay Buddhist, as ordination in the order Ārya Maitreya Mandala did not assume monkhood (see Govinda 1986). Knobeloch emphasized rational, reason-based and demythologized aspects of Buddhism and underscored its full alliance with the natural sciences. He highlighted study and intellectual interpretation of scriptures and stressed the foundation of religion in texts. Still more, both disputants opted to re-connect in an essentializing way to the 'original Buddhism' and 'the words of the Buddha himself.' They distanced themselves from intermediate Buddhist tradition and developments and valued their own form of Buddhism as supreme and appropriate to their time. Also, modern aspects were displayed in public debates by way of written articles in journals and pamphlets.

This chapter will provide a sketch of the receiving and adopting of Buddhist ideas and practices from the nineteenth to the early twenty-first century in Europe. Chronologically organized, it will work out modernist ideas, imaginings, and interpretations of scholars and Buddhists in the modern period. While looking toward the East, most nevertheless remained deeply steeped in the European history of ideas and religions with, on the one hand, an emphasis on rationality, science, and demythologization, and on the other hand a romantic idealization of nature, art, and self-cultivation. Both orientations and predilections reshaped the figure of the Buddha and Buddhism to these underlying ideas and projections.

This chapter will provide the main facts of the history of Buddhism in Europe. However, the aim here is not a descriptive reconstruction of the historic developments, as this has been done in more detail elsewhere (Bechert 1984; Batchelor 1994; Baumann 1995, 2001, 2002). Rather, the contribution argues that the adaptation of Asian ideas and practices and their selective interpretation were strongly rooted in Protestant concepts, the Enlightenment, orientalism, and romanticism. As the adoption of Buddhist ideas and practices by modern Buddhists around 1900 and since the 1960s illustrates, re-interpretations and innovations creating a 'western Buddhism' typically employed the determination of a so-called original or essential Buddhism – hermeneutically shaped by pervasive concepts of the European history of ideas.

Initial Perceptions and European Lenses

The initial reception of Buddhism in Europe was strongly marked by a selection of interests in ethics, philosophy, rationality, and a critique of European culture. Promoters were Western intellectuals and writers, as Asian immigrants of Buddhist background did not arrive until the late twentieth century.

Since the seventeenth century, reports of travelers and Jesuit missionaries and first translations of Indian scriptures by British officers provided an incipient and fragmentary image about Buddhist customs and concepts. As texts and descriptions of Indian religions became known in literate and academic circles in the late eighteenth century, enthusiasm for the East gained momentum. In particular, the Romantic movement with its rejection of the pre-eminence of rationalism and emphasis on poetry, art, and nature discovered the Asian world and its religious and philosophical traditions. German Sanskritist Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) coined the term 'Oriental Renaissance' for the movement in 1803, highlighting like many fellow romantics the longing for a genuine spirituality in India. Sanskrit texts would enable a reconnecting to a pure and unpolluted religiousness, supposedly lost in a Europe dominated by decadent Christian churches (Schwab 1950; Halbfass 1988; Batchelor 1994: 250–4).

Until the 1840s, European intellectuals did not understand Buddhism as a religious tradition of its own. Rather, they conceived Buddhist ideas as forming part of the beliefs of the 'Hindoos.' Typically modern, an academic study delineated the boundaries and differences between Hindu and Buddhist traditions. In 1844, French philologist Eugène Burnouf (1801–52) presented in his *L'Introduction à l'histoire du bouddhisme indien* the first scientific survey of Buddhist history and doctrines. He imposed a rational order on ideas hitherto perceived as unrelated, thus creating the 'prototype of the European concept of Buddhism,' as Stephen Batchelor argued (1994: 239). Subsequently, a boom of translations, studies and portrayals paved the way for an enhanced knowledge of and interest in Buddha as a historical person and in his doctrines. In particular, the philosophical writings of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) stirred up an intellectual interest in Buddhist ideas and ethics among artists, academics and writers. His one-sided understanding of Buddhism as basically a teaching of pessimism coined the image of Buddhism as a nihilist philosophy until long into the twentieth century.

During the days of initial reception, Buddhism was not exported from abroad by Asian people and representatives. On the contrary, it was imported from within by European orientalists, philosophers, and academics. Importantly, they molded and presented Buddhism according to their specific interests, either as a utopian panacea for Europe's attributed spiritual decline or, as with Schopenhauer, as a confirmation of his philosophical views. Characteristically Protestant in attitude, European writers and academics treated Buddhism essentially as a textual object, being rooted in scriptures and interpreted from written texts. Buddhism as actually lived in Asia was of no interest (Almond 1988).

Due to the dominant nineteenth-century Protestant discourse about religion in Western Europe, religion was conceived of as text-based, private, personally experienced, and acted out by the mature individual. This understanding defined the image of the typically modern religion and religious virtuosi. In the same way, it ostracized religious intermediaries, institutional tradition, hierarchy, and external authority (Matthes 2000; Behloul 2010). Early European Buddhists adopted and formed Buddhism along these discursive guidelines.

Portrayals of the Buddha

In the nineteenth century, France, England and Germany had been the countries foremost in studying and textualizing Buddhism in Europe. The early portrayals of Buddhism and the Buddha engendered a growing interest among writers and intellectuals as well as critics and defenders of Christianity. In 1860, French statesman Jules Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire published *Le Bouddha et sa religion*. The account developed into one of the most popular works on Buddhism of the time. Like the

clergymen, he intended to discredit Buddhism and to establish the superiority of Christianity. A few decades later, with first Buddhist converts vehemently defending Buddhist ideals, the debate grew into a polemic and aggressive clash.

Up until the 1870s, scholars relied mainly on accidentally collected Mahāyāna Buddhist texts, be they Nepalese, Tibetan or Chinese manuscripts. Based in part on these, the American Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) and the flamboyant Russian Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–91) founded the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875. Blavatsky argued for a pre-historic Buddhism as the primeval religion of India and of all religions. As the first Buddhist-influenced organization in the West, it marked an increasing interest in Asian religions in the USA and Europe (Fields 1981: 83–118). Olcott's widely received *Buddhist Catechism* (1881) supported an idiosyncratic theosophical image of the Buddha, Dharma and the *saṅgha* and attempted to establish a correlation between Buddhism and science (McMahan 2008 99). Numerous branches of the Theosophical Society come into being, amongst others the London Lodge in 1878, the Lodge Germania in 1884, and a lodge in Austria in 1894. Obviously, in early twentieth-century Germany and England, Buddhists and Theosophists closely cooperated and supported each other.

The Theosophist advocacy for Eastern spirituality was paralleled by Sir Edwin Arnold's romantic poem *The Light of Asia* (1879, based on the Lalitavistara. His portrayal of the Buddha as a 'noble hero and reformer' and the teaching saturated by 'the immortality of a boundless love, an indestructible element of faith in final good, and the proudest assertion ever made of human freedom' (Arnold 1879: preface) appealed to the Victorian tastes and romantic longings of the time (Batchelor 1994: 261). The book aroused a strong interest among bourgeois, educated members of the upper and middle classes in Europe and the USA. 'The sale of the book exceeded a million copies in Europe and America, its circulation being wider than that of any other book on Buddhism,' as William Peiris noted a century later (Peiris 1973: xxiv).

These portrayals of the Buddha as a noble, ethical teacher coincided with a decisive shift towards the texts of the Pāli canon around 1880. British scholar and former official to Ceylon, Thomas W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) established the Pāli Text Society in 1881. Together with his wife Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids (1857–1942) he studied, translated and published Buddhist texts preserved in the Pāli language. 'Both presented Buddhism as an ethical psychology, deemphasizing ritual and religious elements ... and were among the first to refer to Buddhism as a "science of mind",' as David McMahan argued in reconstructing the main lines of modern interpretations of Buddhism (McMahan 2008: 52).

Along similar lines, German Indologist Hermann Oldenberg (1854–1920) with his Pāli based study, *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order* (1881, English translation 1882), strongly contributed to establishing the Buddha as a historic figure and to popularizing

Buddhism more than any other study of the time in the German-speaking area. He held that the Pāli canon represented the authentic, original and pure Buddhist teachings, devoid of mythologies, interpretations, and accretions of later tradition.

With characteristic Protestant emphasis on the written text, the Rhys Davidses, Oldenberg and others developed the approach that considered the Pāli canon to be the authoritative access to the word of the Buddha. The shift from Tibetan, Chinese, and Nepalese sources towards the study of Pāli texts reinforced a demythologizing and anti-ritual attitude and mirrored the prominent evolutionist attempt to track down the Buddhism that was most ancient and unpolluted. With a typically anti-Catholic attitude, later developments of tradition and organization were held as priestly corruptions and distortions.[1] The scholars bypassed established Buddhist traditions and interpretations and ignored Buddhism as lived and practiced in South Asia. Interest was oriented toward ethical, philosophical, and scientific concepts which proved well fitting to the discursive pattern of a 'true' modern religion. This glorifying rational and purged construction of the Buddha and Buddhism was adopted by Buddhist reformers such as Dharmapāla in South Asia and established global flows of images and interpretation of 'true' Buddhism.

Buddhist scholar-practitioners at the fin-de-siècle

This predominant Protestant modernist pattern imprinted the adoption of Buddhist teaching among most pioneer converts in Europe at the turn of the century. Scholars such as Indologist Karl Eugen Neumann (1865–1915) and Dr Karl Seidenstücker (1876–1936) exclusively focused on the translation of Pāli treatises and rational aspects of the Buddha word. They had become self-converted followers of the teachings by their strenuous occupation with translating the texts. Neumann's translation not only intended to render Buddhist stories and teachings into German, but also to transform the passages in poetic language in order to appeal to the urban bourgeois audience of the late nineteenth century. Later Buddhist translators such as Paul Dahlke strongly criticized Neumann's rendering as free and fanciful. Karl Seidenstücker, founder of Europe's first Buddhist society in 1903 in Leipzig, reversed his Protestant upbringing as a son of a pastor to become an outspoken critic of state Protestantism and papist Catholicism. In his opinion, Christianity was dogmatic, authoritarian, and faith-based, and a principal cause of the decline of values and morals in Europe. In contrast, Buddhism was non-violent, a religion of reason and insight, based on empirical evidence and autonomous ethics, emphasizing personal responsibility. As such, 'Buddhism is the religion of the future,' as Seidenstücker emphatically ended his polemic treatise *Buddha and Christ: A Buddhist Apologetic* (1903 in German). The protest against Christianity was simultaneously combined with a process of religious emancipation from it.

The rational interpretations typically mirrored ideals and values of the urbanized middle class from which the majority of early Buddhists in Europe came. These bourgeois values accentuated personal responsibility, moral conduct, reason, and individuality. It was in these academic and learned circles that the values and ideals of European humanism and enlightenment were regarded highly, and appreciated in a romantic attitude. In this milieu, Buddhism served to retain these vanishing values, bestowing on them religious sanctification.

Two approaches to interpreting Buddhism that differed from the predominant rational and anti-ritualistic reading came to the fore, however. Instead of merely reading the texts and dwelling on scholarly abstractions, young men began taking the teachings and Theravāda Buddhist ideals to heart and went to South Asia for monastic ordination. Recent research has found, for example, that the Irish Laurence O'Rourke became a novice and years later a monk (Pāli: *bhikkhu*). Ordained as U Dhammaloka in the mid 1890s in colonial Burma, he appears to be the first western man to have taken the Buddhist robe (Cox 2009; Turner, Cox and Bocking 2010). In 1899, British Gordon Douglas was ordained as Aśoka in Colombo, Sri Lanka. More famous than these first two Westerners, the Scottish former Golden Dawn occultist Allan Bennett (1872–1923) was ordained a monk under the name Ananda Metteyya in 1902 in Burma.[2] Being in touch with 'eminent Buddhists in England, America and Germany,' in 1903 he founded the 'International Buddhist Society, to be known as the Buddhasasana Samagama – at first in these countries of the East, and later extending it to the West' (Metteyya, quoted in Humphrey 1968: 3). The foundation provides evidence of the well-established international exchange among early western Buddhists as well as for the aim to work for the collaboration of Buddhists globally. In 1907, some 25 Londoners assembled and founded the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland as an official branch of the international society. The objectives of the society were the spreading of knowledge of Buddhism and the study of Pāli. It comprised scholars (e.g. T. Rhys Davids), practicing Buddhists, and educated men and women, as well as leading Theosophists (ibid.: 5). In fact, unlike on the continent, Buddhist activities in Britain often consisted of a close cooperation of Theosophists and Buddhists until the mid twentieth century. Tellingly, long-time leading Buddhist Christmas Humphreys (1901–83) refers to his Theosophical conviction and his admiration for Blavatsky's beliefs (Humphreys 1968: 18).[3] Therefore, in 1924 he and befriended Theosophists founded the Buddhist Centre of the Theosophical Society. A year later the members inaugurated a shrine room for meditation and started to publish a monthly bulletin (Cousins 1994).

These incipient endeavors sought to add practical dimensions of Buddhism to the translating, reading and rational interpretation of Pāli texts. At times, they were mingled with strong Theosophical convictions and romantic yearning for reconnecting to an 'ancient wisdom-religion'. In fact, many at those times did not

distinguish between Theosophy and Buddhism and quite a few became Buddhists by way of a Theosophical impulse.

A second approach to move onwards from intellectual reasoning and scholarly abstractions to lived and practiced Buddhism was taken with the attempt to establish monasteries for Theravāda monks in Europe. The first attempt was undertaken by Nyānatiloka, who was a former German violinist, Anton W. F. Gueth (1878–1957) and an ordained Theravāda monk in 1904 in Burma. Not long after his ordination, Nyānatiloka and other German Buddhists started plans for a monastery in Germany or Switzerland (Seidenstücker 1907). However, prominent figures such as the above-mentioned Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire and a number of Christian theologians strongly criticized Buddhism as 'devastating nihilism' and 'wretched pessimism' (Falke 1903: 70; Römer 1910: 162). In Germany the Emperor Wilhelm II had likewise publicly declared his disapproval of Buddhism in the 1890s.[4]

Nyānatiloka, therefore, went to the more liberal south Switzerland, where on Monte Verità, near Ascona, there was already an international alternative community of anarchists, vegetarians, socialists, early feminists, and other culture-critical people. During the winter of 1909–10, the 32-year-old monk lived in an Alpine shepherd's chalet, dressed in a traditional Theravāda monk's robe and scanty sandals. He suffered from the snow and the 'unspeakable cold,' as he narrated in his autobiographical notes (quoted in Hecker 1995: 29). After a brief excursion to North Africa he was invited to Lausanne to stay in the 'Caritas-Viharo' owned by the wealthy industrialist Bergier. It was there that a Buddhist ordination was conducted for the first time in European history, when in October 1910 the 23-year-old German Bartel Bauer became a novice. As donations for the planned European *vihāra* remained meager, Nyānatiloka left for Ceylon, where he founded the famous Island Hermitage on the island of Polgasduva in 1911. This island, purchased by Bergier and presented to Nyānatiloka, became an important venue for Western monks (Carrithers 1983: 26–45; Hecker 1995; Baumann 2000: 154–5).

The idea of founding a monastery had been influenced by the Theravāda model in South Asia as well as the life-reform movement with its back-to-nature orientation, vegetarianism, and agrarian projects. The fin-de-siècle produced multiple ideas and experiments to lay foundations for a 'third way' between capitalism and communism. Weary of the city and modern life, anarchists, socialists, artists, teachers, and others put their ideas into practice to reform decadent European society. In fields such as education, diet, natural healing, dress, nudism, sexuality, liberation of women, cooperative, community life, arts and culture, religion and spirituality, alternative and at times bizarre cultural forms came into being (Krebs and Reulecke 1998). Many of these attempts related back to ideas of romanticism and its idealization of nature as against society, simplicity, renunciation, solitude, and heroism.

The Monte Verità community, founded in 1900, was only one of many such projects,

though well known and frequently visited by reformist urban individuals (Szeemann 1980; Landmann 2009). Nyānatiloka and other Buddhists sharing romantic ideals strongly sympathized with the view of a decaying European society and life-reform as a means for healing. Nyānatiloka reports in his autobiography that he studied Schopenhauer at length in his teens and started to live the asceticism valorized in Schopenhauer's philosophy:

> From about my seventeenth year I renounced alcohol and smoking, which I recognized as being harmful to body, mind, and morals.... from about the beginning of 1899, I became a vegetarian based on ethical grounds. After a lecture in the vegetarian restaurant 'Ceres' given by the famous theosophical speaker Edwin Boehme, I became an enthusiastic follower of Buddhism, more by feeling than through intellectual understanding
>
> *(translated by Carrithers 1983: 33).*

Nyānatiloka's way to become a Buddhist was paradigmatic for many Buddhists of the time: He grew up in a bourgeois urban family, received a good education, read Schopenhauer, and got into contact with life-reform ideas and spiritual searchers such as Theosophists in his late teens. For many such seekers and culture-critics of the fin-de-siècle, it was popular to find guidelines for an ethically based life in the pre-modern history of Europe and the emerging history of non-European religions (Linse 1983; Kippenberg 2002). In line with the romantic Oriental renaissance, many hoped to find the unpolluted and original religion in India. Thus, romantic Buddhists earnestly hoped to bring about a regeneration of European values through the ethics and teaching of the Buddha. Assisted by Buddhism, portrayed as the oldest and wisest religion of mankind (the Theosophical version), European culture would step out of the darkness and world-weariness of the fin-de-siècle and resume its former grandeur and glory. The glorification of India and Buddhist teaching served as a means for a critique of contemporary society and morals as well as an impulse for reform. Here, the strands of romantic and rational Buddhists met and the protagonists emphatically worked to spread the universal remedy.

Permanent homes for Buddhism in the West

After the devastating experience of the First World War, Buddhists emphasized the need for practicing the teachings. Although some small circles continued to aesthetically play with Buddhist ideas, in contrast newly founded 'parishes' emphasized religious practices such as worship, spiritual exercises, and devotional acts. The teachings were considered to be important not only for the mind and intellect, but also to the whole person. In 1921, Georg Grimm (1868–1945), a former Catholic judge, together with Karl Seidenstücker

initiated the 'Buddhist Parish for Germany' in Munich. The parish saw itself expressly as a religious community of lay Buddhists. Its members had resorted to the Three Jewels, i.e. to the Buddha, Dharma and *sangha*, and followed the five ethical precepts. Lectures held by Grimm were attended by about 500 to, occasionally, 1000 listeners.

In Berlin, Dr Paul Dahlke (1865–1928), a homeopathic doctor and Buddhist since 1900, made plans to establish a place for Buddhism. In 1924, some 14 years after Nyānatiloka's attempt for a *vihāra*, Dahlke and a few close followers founded the Buddhist House. In his inauguration speech Dahlke emphasized, 'the aim and intention of the house is … to create a local focal point, a permanent home for Buddhism in the West' (Dahlke 1925a: 86). There, in the 'secure place of outer and inner purity' (Dahlke 1925b: 8), the tireless Dahlke put his ideals of renunciation, purification, and self-cultivation into practice. His view of Buddhism as a 'teaching of reality' culminated in his adopting an ascetic and virtually monastic way of life. Similar to Nyānatiloka, Dahlke praised the same attitudes and ideals, originating from the German romantic ideas of loneliness, self-cultivation, and moral heroism (see in detail, Baumann 2006).

In Britain, the Buddhist-Theosophical society continued to constitute the focal point of Buddhists and Buddhist Theosophists. On a brief visit to England in 1925, Ceylonese reformer Anagārika Dharmapāla expressed his vision to establish a permanent *vihāra* with a preaching hall, library, and residential quarters for monks (Humphreys 1968: 23). A year later, a British branch of Dharmapāla's international Mahā Bodhi Society was founded and in 1928 the monastery came into being with three resident *bhikkhu*s in London. It was the first time that Asian Theravāda monks stayed for a significant period outside of Asia and lived according to the *vinaya* (monastic rules) in a European country. Though they were applauded on their arrival, leading Buddhist Christmas Humphreys pointed out that the monks needed to present 'the principle of Buddhism in a form acceptable to the Western mind' (Humphreys 1968: 31). Such a view and advice expressed by a lay person to *bhikkhu*s would have been unthinkable in Ceylon and considered rude and unseemly. However, it illustrates the strong self-confidence of western Buddhists and their intention to reshape Buddhism according to the social needs of a modernizing society and its emphasis on an individualized and autonomous lifestyle (in particular in the bourgeois middle classes).

Only a few Buddhist activities occurred in European countries other than Germany and Great Britain until the mid twentieth century. Buddhist activities relied almost exclusively on one charismatic person who was able to attract people to his or her vision. In France, Grace Constant Lounsbery (1876–1964), a wealthy, American-born woman, founded the society 'Les amis du Bouddhisme' in 1929. The Paris-based group remained small, but succeeded in publishing its own journal, *La Pensée bouddhique*. In Switzerland, Max Ladner (1889–1963) inspired some Buddhist activities during the 1940s and 1950s; about 12 or 15 people met once a month in his private house. The

Zurich-based group published the Buddhist journal *Die Einsicht*. With its demise in 1961, the group ended as well. Although there had been a few scattered individual Buddhists in Austria, Hungary, and Italy (the famous Giuseppe Tucci, for example), no further Buddhist organizations came into being until the late 1940s.[5]

In general, from the 1880s to the late 1940s, the teachings and texts of the Pāli canon and the Theravāda monk as the ideal and model had dominated the European adoption of Buddhism. Philosophical, ethical and cognitive interests stood out clearly. The norm of a Buddhist in Europe was conceived of as a rational, detached person, who intellectually purifies himself (seldom herself) from the root defilements of ignorance, hatred, and lustfulness. Also, the idea of Buddhism as the oldest ethical teaching of mankind brought romantic seekers to embrace Buddhism. Rationalist and romantic Buddhists alike praised the Buddha and his teaching as a means to heal European culture from its moral decline – both at the fin-de-siècle and after the First World War.

Buddhism around 1900 and in the 1920s clearly formed an international movement with mutual visits, exchanges of letters, and reports on Buddhism in other regions of the world. This strengthened the endeavors of the numerically small groups and engendered a consciousness of a coherent movement of pioneer Buddhists. Quite a few European Buddhists had visited South Asia, whereas famous Asian modernist Buddhists such as Anagārika Dharmapāla and Daisetz T. Suzuki came for speaking tours to Europe. These mutual exchanges and contacts underscored the transnational characteristic of an increasingly global Buddhism. Even more, the supposedly rigid boundaries set up between 'Europe' and 'the East' or 'the Orient' (Said 1978) were being questioned with the idealistic adoption of Orient-Asian ideas, concepts, and ritual practices. Therefore, quite a number of the early Buddhists acted and thought beyond national categories.

Plurality and immigration[6]

This trend toward situating oneself and one's particular Buddhist group in a larger international context become even more apparent after the Second World War. The war had brought an end to most Buddhist activities in Europe. However, not long after the war, Buddhists started to reconstruct former Theravāda groups or founded new ones. The agony of the war led many people to look out for non-Christian, alternative life orientations. Buddhist lectures were well attended and Buddhist books and journals well received. From the 1950s onwards, new Buddhist traditions were brought to Europe. Japanese Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land Teachings) came to Britain (1952) and Germany (1956). Zen Buddhism became known through the writings of Daisetz T. Suzuki and Eugen Herrigel. Before Zen became popular in Europe, Nichiren Buddhism traveled with Japanese businessmen and students to Britain, France, Italy,

Germany, and elsewhere. Two decades later, a multitude of local Sōka Gakkai groups existed, with European convert members far outnumbering the Japanese members. Until the mid 1990s the Sōka Gakkai had been exclusive and formed no bonds or forms of cooperation with other Buddhist traditions. In the early twenty-first century the globally disseminated Buddhist organization appears to be one of the numerically strongest Buddhist groups in Europe (Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994; Dobbelaere 1998; Hourmant 1999; Bluck 2006).

Importantly, and in contrast to the early phase of adoption, from the 1960s on a multitude of new groups, societies, and institutions were founded in Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden. Buddhism spread more and more widely as attractive books and translations became readily available. Simultaneously, Asian teachers started visiting the incipient groups, lecturing and conducting courses on a regular basis (Yamamoto 1967).

The 1960s also brought about a considerable change in the way that members and interested people wanted to experience Buddhism both spiritually and physically. Meditation became very popular. Courses in Zen and *vipassanā* meditation were booked up well in advance. Zen seminars took place in increasing numbers, with teachers coming from Japan to guide the newly-formed Zen groups. In addition, increasing numbers of young Europeans had started to travel to India or Burma in search of 'Indian spirituality' and religious guidance. The romantic yearning for wholeness and originality was sought – again – in the East. In similar tone, ideas and ideals for a change and renewal of society were brought forward.

After the Zen boom of the 1960s and 1970s, a fascination for Tibetan Buddhism and its teachers started. Tibetan teachers (*lamas*) had first come to England, France and Switzerland in the late 1960s and had established centers. From the mid-1970s on, however, as further high-ranking lamas conducted preaching tours in Europe, Tibetan Buddhism took off. Many members of the protest movements and the counterculture of the late 1960s became fascinated by Tibetan Buddhist rituals, symbols, and the lives of the *lamas*, whom they considered inspirational, sensitive and endowed with charisma. Many hoped that Tibetan Buddhism would re-enchant what they considered a coldly rational society (Bitter 1988). In addition, the captivating appearances of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama inspired the Western followers. Since his first journey to Europe in 1973, the Dalai Lama has repeatedly visited centers all over Europe (and globally). For many, the Gelugpa monk is a living symbol and embodiment of deep spirituality, social engagement and altruism. Within only two decades, converts to Tibetan Buddhism founded a multitude of centers and groups, at times outnumbering all other Buddhist traditions in establishing centers.

This rapid increase, accompanied by an expansion of the already existing institutions, led to a considerable rise in the number of Buddhist groups and centers. In Britain, for example, the number of groups and centers quintupled in 20 years,



Figure 6.1 Wat Buddhapadipa – the first Buddhist temple in the United Kingdom, established by the London Buddhist Temple Foundation with the objective of creating a center for the dissemination of theoretical and practical Buddhist teachings in Europe

from 74 to some 400 (1979–2000, Buddhist Society 1979ff). In Germany, interest in Buddhism resulted in an exponential increase from around 40 groups in 1975 to more than 500 meditation circles, groups, centers and societies in 1999 (Baumann 2001: 19). In the first decade of the twenty-first century, numbers of Buddhist groups and centers continued to grow, though at a much slower rate. Processes of consolidation and establishment predominated, though new teachers and organizations still arrived from Korea, the USA and other countries.

Comparable explosive growth rates occurred in other European countries as well, such as Italy, Austria, Switzerland, France, The Netherlands, and Denmark. Also, Eastern European countries witnessed a growing interest in Buddhism following the political changes since 1989. In particular, Tibetan and Zen groups have been founded in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and western parts of the Russian Federation. Visits by European and North American Buddhist teachers, as well as a longing for spiritual alternatives to the established Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, brought about a steady growth of Buddhism in eastern Europe.

In addition to the strand of Western convert Buddhists, since the 1960s considerable numbers of Buddhists from Asian countries have come to Western Europe. In France in particular, many refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have immigrated. Paris has become the central place for Southeast Asian Buddhist migrants (Choron-Baix 1986; Kalab 1994). Vietnamese Buddhists in France succeeded in building a huge pagoda near Paris, following the impressive pagoda built earlier by Vietnamese Buddhists in Hannover (Germany). Also, in Great Britain, the Netherlands and other western European nation-states, refugees, migrants, and businessmen from Asian countries have found asylum or work. In the process of settling down, they founded religious and cultural institutions to preserve their religious-cultural identity and heritage. By visiting pagodas and temples, performing customary acts of devotional worship, and jointly celebrating Buddhist festivals, the Asian Buddhists regain an 'esprit de clocher' (Choron-Baix 1991: 22), a home away from home. More often than not, most Asian migrant communities have turned out to be markedly conservative, presenting a stable and familiar environment for their members in the socio-culturally foreign, often discriminatory, environment. Changes are inevitable, however, as the second and third generations grow up and aim to combine their religious-cultural heritage with Western ideas, aspirations, and ideals. Role models are changing, hierarchies are shifting, and calls are heard for modernizing rituals and performing them in European languages.

In general, during the second half of the twentieth century, two characteristics stand out: Buddhism was no longer dominated by a single main tradition, as had been the case in Europe with Theravāda Buddhism. Rather, since the 1950s, Buddhist teachers of various traditions arrived from Asia to win converts and to found centers.

A plurality of Buddhist traditions emerged, substantially supplemented by immigrant Buddhists. Secondly, the shift from intellectual interest to practical application deepened and spread through increased interest in meditation.

Westernization and indigenization

The past century saw a tremendous change in the presence and constitution of Buddhism in Europe. However, one aspect has remained the same. As with the early Buddhists, many Buddhists from the 1950s on worked to mold, reshape and indigenize Buddhist teaching and practices to the needs of the autonomous individual and the conditions of a western society. Broadly, we may differentiate four main types of Buddhist outside of Asia:

(1) first-generation immigrants continuing their culturally embedded Buddhism in a rather conservative manner;
(2) convert Buddhists practicing Buddhism as closely as possible to the Asian model;
(3) second-generation immigrants adapting and changing established roles, hierarchies, and practices;
(4) convert Buddhists consciously reforming and reinventing Buddhist teachings and practices to align them with Western conditions.

Certainly, many sub-forms may be found in the by now very wide spectrum of Buddhists and Buddhisms in Europe. The remainder of this chapter will point to a few selected contemporary interpretations of type 4, i.e., Buddhists vigorously championing the modernization and indigenization of Buddhist ideas, practices, and world-views.

Already in the 1930s, German-born Lama Govinda (Ernst Lothar Hoffmann, 1898–1985) argued for a new Buddhist order with the aim of viewing the 2500 years of Buddhist history as a coherent developmental process. Govinda gave the order the name of Ārya Maitreya Mandala (AMM, still extant, and to a large extent based on the core teachings and practices of Tibetan Vajrayāna), and he strongly favored a comprehensive understanding of the various Buddhist traditions and schools. According to him, in the West with the coming together of the different Buddhist traditions, ‘we have the great chance for a new start today’ (Govinda 1986: 25). The unprecedented access to all forms of Buddhism would enable modern Buddhists to crystallize ‘the essential of *all* schools of Buddhism’ (ibid.: 44). Govinda accentuated the value of intuition and the need for ‘a profound change of the human personality by way of a heroic commitment of all psychic energies [Sanskrit: *vīrya*]’ (ibid.: 36). Govinda shared a romantic longing and appeal for personal change with Nyānatiloka and Dahlke. Indeed, Govinda often referred to German Romantic Novalis and polymath Goethe and underscored the importance of art as true expressions of interior states (cf. McMahan 2008: 135–6).



Figure 6.2 Lama Govinda (center) at the Kasardevi Ashram, Almora (1966)

Though the order never did grow into a large and influential organization, Govinda's books, such as *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (1960, German 1956) and *The Way of the White Clouds* (1966), made him famous in spiritual and neo-romantic circles. Thus, he continued the idealization of Tibet by Blavatsky and others and paved the way for the later idealization of Tibetan Buddhism among Western converts.

With a different emphasis and more success than the AMM (in terms of spread and numbers), the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) programmatically works for a Buddhism fitting Western conditions. It was founded by the British-born

Sangharakshita (Dennis Lingwood, 1925–) in 1967 in London as a response to the dominant intellectual reception of Buddhism. Sangharakshita held that 'the FWBO is ... a Western spiritual movement, a Western spiritual phenomenon. It seeks to practice Buddhism under the conditions of modern Western civilization, which is a secularized and industrialized civilization' (Sangharakshita 1990: 54). Basic to the FWBO is its reference to 'the spirit of the Original teaching' (Sangharakshita 1987: 97). The organization deliberately ignores extant Buddhist traditions and does not align itself with any extant Asian school. Sangharakshita considers himself a translator who communicates the 'spirit' of the Buddha and Buddhist teachings to western people. In addition, western art and literature – such as that of Blake, Goethe, and Nietzsche – are introduced as so-called bridges to an understanding of the Dharma (Vessantara 1988: 9). In a way similar to Govinda, Sangharakshita refers back to romantics and art to stretch the mind 'further than the limits of its own rationality into the "distance beyond" of Beauty' (Sangharakshita 1986: 34). This presentation of Buddhism, coupled with its strong emphasis on the three-fold refuge, community, and integration of Buddhism into daily life, developed into a global organization. As the spread of the movement is not limited to so-called Western civilizations, Sangharakshita renamed the organization the Buddhist Order Triratna (Three-fold Refuge) in 2010. The old name 'Western' would no longer fit.

Whereas these and other contemporary Buddhist organizations stress aspects of romanticism, other groups and Buddhist proponents emphasize a rational and non-religious approach as a means for indigenization. For more than a decade, one of its most outspoken representatives of an agnostic and demythologized Buddhism is Stephen Batchelor (1953–). A former fully ordained Tibetan monk, the British writer, Dharma teacher and scholar advocates stripping Buddhism of such beliefs as *karma* and reincarnation. His best-seller *Buddhism without Beliefs* (1997) retells Buddhist history as a story of decline. According to Batchelor, interpreters turned the Buddha's succinct account of awakening into 'mystical experience' and 'truth' (Batchelor 1997: 1). 'At precisely this juncture, Buddhism becomes a religion. A Buddhist is someone who *believes* these four propositions.... The four ennobling truths become principal dogmas of the belief system known as "Buddhism"' (ibid.: 2). Batchelor distinguishes between 'Buddhism' – in his view a corruption of Buddha's awakening experience – and 'dharma practice' which needs to be acted out (ibid.: 3). The book emphasizes action and practice, avoids technical Buddhist vocabulary and presents the Dharma as an accessible way for everyone here and now. Thus, his exposition meets the tenor of the times, presenting the Dharma as therapeutic, radical, and agnostic. Interestingly, Batchelor's reading of the supposed original experience of the Buddha having become corrupted and 'controlled by an elite body of priests' (ibid.: 16) again takes up a line of argument which was already proposed by English Deists in the seventeenth century and antique philosophers in the fourth century CE in relation to

Christianity. The development of religion is a history of decline at the hands of self-serving priests.

Conclusion

Many more approaches for an indigenization of Buddhism to Western settings have emerged during past decades of the adoption of Buddhism beyond Asia (Prebish and Baumann 2002). A characteristic feature of most modern Buddhist interpretations is their lack of reference to historic tradition(s). Rather, new approaches were legitimated by reference to the supposed 'original' word and experience of the Buddha. In a typical reformist attitude, modern Buddhist proponents advocate a return to the essentials of Buddhism. They self-consciously differentiate between cultural accretions and Buddhism's essential core. These core elements are often considered timeless, universal, pure, and 'original' teaching of the Buddha. Such a reading of Buddhist history and developments often entails suspicion and criticism of all of those elements not considered part of this essential core. As liberal theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) had demonstrated already in 1903, such an interpretation carries hermeneutic problems, however. At that time, Protestant theologians debated the 'essence of Christianity' and its relation to the history of tradition. Troeltsch systematized the arguments and underscored that every essential determination is at the same time a shaping of the essence ('Wesenbestimmung ist Wesensgestaltung,' Troeltsch 1922 [1903]: 431).

Troeltsch demonstrated that a determination of the 'essentials' is actually the construction of an ideal. It provides a criterion for evaluating the progression of a tradition and its deviation from the 'essentials' (ibid.: 407). Early and contemporary modernist Buddhists acted in exactly this way: They eschewed orienting themselves with any particular Buddhist tradition or school and constructed idealized representations of the spirit of the original teaching (Sangharakshita), Dharma practice (Batchelor), Buddha as noble hero (Arnold), Buddhism as religion of reason (Seidenstücker), Buddhism as renunciation and self-cultivation (Nyānatiloka, Dahlke), and others. While they saw these ideals as representing the essence of Buddhism, these representations were constructed out of their own modern concerns and deeply rooted in their own historical and cultural contexts. These new interpretations were most often based on a romantic or a rational-scientific re-reading and reconstruction of the meaning and intention of Buddhist teaching. Early and contemporary Buddhist modernists have seen Buddhism as a means of renewal, a solution to the perceived state of crisis and the decadence of the times. While Buddhists sharing a romantic attitude proclaimed the value of personal self-cultivation, moral heroism, and re-enchantment, Buddhists with a rational inclination emphasized aspects of science, reason, and autonomous ethics. Modern Buddhists adopted new concepts and terms,

the underlying grammar of which more often than not was based on the European history of ideas.

Summary

- Buddhist ideas were introduced to Europe from the late eighteenth century, emphasizing philosophical and ethical ideas but neglecting, however, any religious practice and ritual.
- Early Buddhists in Europe around 1900 exclusively relied on the teachings of the Pāli canon and accentuated rational aspects of the Buddha word. They held that the Pāli treatises represented the authentic, original, and pure Buddhist teachings, devoid of mythologies and cultural accretions.
- The practice of Buddhist teaching first started with young Europeans becoming Theravāda monks around 1900 and with the founding of Buddhist parishes in the 1920s. During that period, there were only few adherents to Buddhism but they had many contacts to other culture-critical movements.
- The pluralization of Buddhism in Europe started in the 1950s, bringing various traditions from Japan and Tibet. Since the 1980s, a sharp increase in interest and numbers of groups was observable, spreading Buddhism in all middle-class segments of European countries. In addition, the arrival of immigrants from Asian countries substantially broadened the numerical basis of Buddhism in most countries.
- The adaptation of Buddhist ideas and practices and their selective interpretation by modern Buddhists were strongly rooted in Protestant concepts, the Enlightenment, orientalism, and romanticism.
- While modern Buddhists sharing a romantic attitude proclaimed the value of personal self-cultivation, moral heroism, and re-enchantment, modern Buddhists with a rational inclination emphasized aspects of science, reason, and autonomous ethics. Whatever their inclination, they shaped Buddhism in accordance with pervasive concepts of the European history of ideas.

Discussion questions

- Discuss how European romanticism was used as a template for interpreting Buddhism in Europe.
- Discuss how the scientific-rationalist line of thought was used to interpret Buddhism in Europe.
- Is it possible to determine the ‘essence’ of a religion without interjecting elements of one’s own culture and presuppositions?

- Why do you think so many European Buddhists were interested in getting back to the 'original teachings' of the Buddha and saw much that came later as a decline or degradation of these teachings?

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Notes

1 Typically Victorian and anti-Catholic, Edwin Arnold asserted: 'The extravagances which disfigure the record and practice of Buddhism are to be referred to that inevitable degradation which priesthoods always inflict upon great ideas committed to their charge. The power and sublimity of Gautama's original doctrines should be estimated by their influence, not by their interpreters; nor by that innocent but lazy and ceremonious church which has arisen on the foundations of the Buddhistic Brotherhood or "Sangha"' (Arnold 1879: preface).

2 As for his early involvement in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and serving as 'first magical mentor' of Aleister Crowley, see the website of the order, www.golden-dawn.com/eu/displaycontent.aspx?pageid=153-biography-allan-bennett. The chronicle by Humphreys does not mention this connection; see the portrayal of Bennett by Humphreys (1968: 2–11).

3 Humphreys declared that 'I am yet unshaken in my view that the Theosophy of H. P. Blavatsky is an expression of an Ancient Wisdom-Religion which antedates all known religions, and that Buddhism is the noblest and least-defiled of the many branches of the undying parent tree' (1968: 18).

4 In the mid 1890s the German Emperor Wilhelm II personally signed a picture with the legend: 'Völker Europas, wahret eure heiligsten Güter' ('People of Europe, defend your holiest possessions'). The huge picture depicts allegorical figures of the civilized nations of Europe ready for battle with the onrushing legions of the Anti-Christ who, shrouded in dark clouds and the smoke of burning cities, take the shape of the Buddha. See the picture in the anniversary volume for Wilhelm II in Büxenstein (1898: 144).

5 For reasons of space, the article will leave out developments in Russia and former Yugoslavia; see Poppe (1956) and Batchelor (1994: 283–302). For the Buddhist temple in Belgrade, opened by Russian Kalmyk Buddhists, see Pekic (2000).

6 Adopted from Baumann (2002: 91–3).

7 The North American Buddhist Experience

Paul David Numrich

Introduction

The cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall (1996: 8) explains that

> The emergence of modern societies was marked by the birth of a new intellectual and cognitive world, which gradually emerged with the Reformation [beginning in the early sixteenth century], the Renaissance [culminating in the seventeenth century], the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, and the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.

Other scholars begin the modern era with the discovery of a 'New World' in 1492 and subsequent European global exploration and political, economic, and cultural domination. Thus, the histories of both modernity and the North American societies known today as the United States and Canada have coincided from the beginning. When Buddhism arrived in North America in the nineteenth century, it traveled from one modernizing continent to another, initiating a modernizing loop that continues to this day.

This chapter will examine the North American Buddhist experience in the light of global modernity, setting aside the question of whether the world may be entering a postmodern era. The first section provides a historical overview of North American Buddhism, the second section a topical overview, and the concluding section places North American Buddhism in modern global perspective. Modern dynamics include the effects of living in secular political societies where premodern social orders and religious world views are open to challenge and where new understandings of knowledge and identity abound (Hall 1996). Buddhism has been particularly influenced by rationalism, science, and Christianity in the modern era (McMahan 2008a, b; Tweed 2000). Whereas modernity originated in the West, it is now multidirectional and includes global transformations wrought by urbanization, massive population migration leading to increasing diversification of societies and transnational networking, and rapidly advancing technological and communication capacities. These powerful dynamics produce both positive and negative life experiences for modern individuals and groups who nonetheless retain the capacity for creative and meaningful agency (e.g. Soja 2000).

Historical Overview of North American Buddhism

Nineteenth century

Thomas Tweed (2000), a historian of religions in the United States, dates the beginning of the 'American encounter with Buddhism' to 1844. In that year, the Transcendentalist magazine *The Dial* published an English translation of the Lotus Sutra and a Yale

professor gave a paper on the history of Buddhism at the first annual conference of the American Oriental Society. Both events were heavily influenced by the European scholarship on Buddhism that began in the 1820s following many years of colonial and missionary involvement in Asian Buddhist lands. The Indian-born, Harvard-trained scholar P. V. Bapat claimed that this European scholarly awakening initiated a new turning of the Buddhist wheel of the Dharma, not only generating interest in Europe and America but also 'leading to a revival of cultural life in Asian countries and making the world ... Buddha-conscious' (Bapat 1959: 380; cf. deJong 1974). In point of fact, the cultural revival in Asia was driven by both colonialist pressures and indigenous Buddhist dynamics (Blackburn 2010). The modernist reform Buddhist movement that emerged laid the philosophical and religious foundations for many later Buddhist teachers and groups that came to North America (on modern Buddhist dynamics globally, see Swearer 1970; Dumoulin and Maraldo 1976; Bechert 1984).

The first large-scale migration to North America of an Asian population whose religious practices included Buddhist elements began around 1850. Chinese immigrants were initially attracted to the 'Gold Mountain' (*Gam Saan*) of California by the Gold Rush that began in 1848. By 1870 there were some 63,000 Chinese on the mainland United States engaged in a variety of occupations, nearly one-fourth of them living outside of California. Hawaii attracted some 46,000 Chinese immigrants during the same period, Canada more than 9000 by 1891. These migrants were part of an estimated two and a half million people 'pushed' out of China between 1840 and 1900 because of political instability and economic hardship during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). The Qing's power was greatly diminished by Western military and economic domination, including several so-called 'unequal treaties' beginning with the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing that ended the Opium War with Britain (Takaki 1998: chapters 2, 3; Matthews 2002).

Although the Chinese were initially welcomed to the US mainland, the sentiment soon changed to hostility and nativism, epitomized in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was extended indefinitely in 1902. In Canada, the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act and its extensions imposed a head tax to discourage Chinese immigration. As the number of Chinese in the USA slowly declined after 1882, the number of Japanese steadily increased, surpassing the Chinese within two decades and then doubling in another two decades. The Japanese presence was also strong in Hawaii, where even more settled than on the mainland between 1885 and 1924, and in Canada, where they dominated the early history of Canadian Buddhism. Emigrating from the modernizing atmosphere of Meiji-era Japan (1868–1912), Japanese immigrants fared relatively better than their Chinese counterparts and succeeded in establishing the first denominational presence of Buddhism (Jōdo Shinshū) in North America, beginning in 1897 in Hawaii, in 1899 on the US mainland, and in 1905 in Canada (Takaki 1998: chapters 2, 4, 5; Watada 2010; Nishimura 2008).

The larger society's knowledge of and interest in Buddhism increased after the 1879 publication of *The Light of Asia* by the British author Edwin Arnold. Historian Tweed documents the remarkable amount of scholarly and public attention given to Buddhism between 1879 and 1912, leading one prominent New England pastor to exclaim, 'Shall we all become Buddhists?' The most significant event of this period was the World's Parliament of Religions that met in Chicago in 1893 and featured presentations by Soyen Shaku, a Japanese Zen master, and Anagarika Dharmapāla, a key figure in the Buddhist reform movement in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) who for many years was closely associated with the American Henry Olcott Steel and the Theosophical Society. A Jewish American, C. T. Strauss, holds the distinction of being the first American to convert formally to Buddhism on American soil, at the hands of Dharmapāla at the Parliament (Tweed 2000: chapter 2).

First half of the twentieth century

Tweed (2000) ends the Victorian-era American 'encounter' with Buddhism in 1912 but interest in this alternative world view, especially its Zen iterations, continued in pockets of the larger society. Notable interpreters of Buddhism during the first half of the twentieth century included D. T. Suzuki, who accompanied Soyen Shaku to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions and on his return trip to America in 1905–6; Paul Carus; the Theosophical Society; and the Beat Generation writers of the 1950s (Jack Kerouac's novel, *The Dharma Bums*, was published in 1958). Carus's Open Court Publishing Company in LaSalle, Illinois, at which D. T. Suzuki worked for a time, sought 'to present Buddhism in a way that would be palatable to Westerners' (Fields 1992: 141). Carus found the answer to his own disillusionment with Christianity in the modernist Buddhism he encountered at the 1893 Parliament, leading him to characterize the Buddha as 'the first positivist, the first humanitarian, the first radical freethinker, the first iconoclast, and the first prophet of the Religion of Science' (quoted in Verhoeven 1998: 215).

Fascination with Buddhism during this period was overshadowed by hostility toward Asian Buddhists living in North America (Mann, Numrich and Williams 2008: chapter 2). In the United States, the Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan in 1907–8, the 'Asiatic barred zone' legislation of 1917, and the 1924 Immigration Act restricted Asian immigration, while alien land acts targeting immigrant Japanese farmers in several western states prohibited land ownership by non-citizens. (In 1922, the Supreme Court confirmed that Japanese immigrants could not become naturalized citizens because a 1790 law restricted that right to whites.) The forced relocation of more than 100,000 Japanese, both immigrants and American-born citizens, under the wartime provisions of Executive Order 9066 (issued in 1942) was a stark reminder of the precarious social and civic position of Asians living on the mainland United States

(no mass relocation of Japanese residents occurred in Hawaii during the Second World War). Canada's treatment of Asian residents during the first half of the twentieth century was little better than its neighbor's to the south, as it included the 1907 Anti-Asiatic Riot in Vancouver, restrictive immigration laws, and the forced relocation of Japanese residents during the Second World War.

Legal restrictions, the Great Depression, and the Second World War combined to curtail Buddhist immigration to North America during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. The Nisei ('Second') generation of Japanese Buddhists born and raised in North America during these years succeeded in indigenizing their institutional religious life, symbolized in 1944 by the denominational name change from the Buddhist Mission of North America to the Buddhist Churches of America. Anti-Asian hostility began to ease somewhat during the Second World War and with the civil rights era. In the United States, the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943 (China was on the Allied side in the Second World War), Japanese immigrants were granted naturalization rights in 1952, and thousands of Asian women returned from the Korean War (1950–3) with their American military husbands.

1960s to the present

In Canada, the tide turned in the 1960s. The 1962 and 1967 Immigration Acts combined to open the doors again to Asian immigrants, the first act abolishing earlier racial criteria for admittance, the second instituting a merit-based points system. In the United States, the 1965 Immigration Act had the same effect, beginning 'a new chapter in the history of Asians in America' (Takaki 1998: 420). High rates of Asian immigration since the 1960s and increasing numbers of refugees – some from Tibet (which has been occupied by China since 1950), many from Southeast Asia following the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 – have dramatically diversified the North American Buddhist population. To cite but two illustrations of institutional growth, the number of Chinese Buddhist temples in Toronto increased from one in 1968 to at least 23 by 1997 (McLellan 1999: 167–8) while the number of immigrant/refugee Theravāda Buddhist temples across the United States increased from one in 1966 to around 360 today.

The social and civic reception of Buddhists and Buddhism by the larger North American society has improved since the 1960s. Canada's official multiculturalism policy, initiated in 1971 and bolstered by legislation in the 1980s and the creation of the federal Heritage Department in 1993, encourages integration of new population groups without cultural assimilation, although critics worry that it fosters isolationism instead (Matthews 2002: 130–1). American Buddhism had evolved enough by the late 1980s that the Buddhist journalist Rick Fields (1992: chapter 16) interpreted the deaths of important teachers and the revelations of scandalous leadership in some



Figure 7.1 Buddhist monks in traditional robes collect alms while walking through Times Square in New York City (2007)

Buddhist groups as heralding a new era. '[B]y the start of the twenty-first century,' notes Tweed (2000: xviii), Buddhism 'was flourishing, and a new and even more far-reaching Buddhist vogue had set in' than had been the case during the Victorian era. The phenomenal growth of the Internet and global communication capabilities in recent decades has not only brought Buddhism to the fingertips of North American inquirers, it also connects practicing Buddhists in new ways and presents new opportunities (Prebish 1999b: chapter 5). For instance, in one major American city the formation of a new temple affiliated with Dhammakaya Foundation began with members of the oldest and largest local Thai temple viewing satellite feeds from this reformist movement's headquarters in Thailand.

As noted above, European scholarship on Buddhism began in the 1820s. North American scholarship on Buddhism since that Yale professor's paper at the 1844 conference of the American Oriental Society has been dominated by historical and textual topics, following the classical European model. Buddhist studies courses and departments can now be found in several major universities in Hawaii, the mainland United States, and Canada (Prebish 1999a). One indication that a critical mass of Buddhists now lives in North America has been the increase in social scientific

scholarship on them, to the point that they now constitute a field of study in the making (Numrich 2008b; cf. Prebish 2002; Harding, Hori and Soucy 2010: 405–6).

TIMELINE

ca. 1500	Modern era begins
1644-1911	Qing dynasty in China
1776	United States declares independence
1790	Naturalization rights restricted to whites (United States)
1820s	European scholarship on Buddhism begins
1844	"American encounter with Buddhism" begins
ca. 1850	First Chinese immigrants to North America
1867	Dominion of Canada established
1868-1912	Meiji era in Japan
1879	*The Light of Asia* published
1880s	First Japanese immigrants to North America, 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act (United States), 1885 Chinese Immigration Act (Canada)
1893	World's Parliament of Religions
early 1900s	Discriminatory laws and policies
1940s	World War II, forced relocation of Japanese, Chinese Exclusion Act repealed (United States), Buddhist Churches of America (United States)
1950s	Chinese occupation of Tibet, Korean War, Japanese immigrants granted naturalization rights (United States), *The Dharma Bums* published
1960s	Immigration Acts of 1962 and 1967 (Canada) and 1965 (United States)
1971	Multiculturalism Policy of Canada
1975	Vietnam War ends
1970s-present	Unprecedented growth and diversification of North American Buddhism

Topical Overview of North American Buddhism

Four interrelated topics stand out in North American Buddhism: demographics, 'repackaging' the Dharma, intergenerational challenges, and organizational issues.

Demographics

Scholars and other observers debate the number and types of North American Buddhists. The simple question 'How many?' has no simple answer even in Canada where the government census collects information about religious identity. Reasonable estimates of more than 300,000 Buddhists in Canada and as many as four million in the United States have been offered with reservations (Wuthnow and Cadge 2004; McLellan 2008; Beyer 2010). The majority of these Buddhists are Asians representing a great diversity of cultural heritages, some now well beyond the first generation. The related search for a satisfactory typology of North American Buddhists has greatly exercised the field of study in the making. The major distinction between Asian Buddhists and non-Asian converts recognizes 'real differences in the historical appropriation of Buddhist identity' (Numrich 2003: 65). Despite imprecision at the edges of the categories, this 'Two Buddhisms' typology is even occasionally invoked by its critics (e.g. Harding, Hori and Soucy 2010: 14, 19, 28, 86, 108, 128, 189, 208, 322, 328, 342–3; see Hickey 2010 for a systematic critique). Another common typology identifies North American Buddhist groups by lineage, including the three largest branches of historical Buddhism (Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna), schools within these branches, eclectic groups, and new expressions of Buddhism.

One reason for these demographic debates is the fluidity of religious identity for many North American Buddhists. Immigrant and refugee Buddhists may bring a non-exclusive understanding of religious adherence from Asian homelands where individuals can simultaneously practice Buddhism and another religion(s). Some North Americans who incorporate aspects of Buddhism into their identity and world view could be considered hyphenated Buddhists (Jewish-Buddhists, for instance) or Buddhist sympathizers rather than full-fledged adherents (Seager 1999: 225–31; Tweed 2002). Modernity's emphasis on individualism and rational choice legitimates religious 'shopping around' and eclectic spiritual practices, and Buddhism is often perceived as particularly amenable to such an approach (see Campbell 2010).

Repackaging the Dharma

Two important books invoke an avian metaphor for North American Buddhism: *How the Swans Came to the Lake* (Fields 1992) and *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada* (Harding,

Hori and Soucy 2010). The metaphor is apt in implying the movement of Buddhist groups and ideas from one cultural context to another plus the preparations and adaptations involved in the process. Moreover, as the contributors to *Wild Geese* remind us, the destination is not the end of the story. North American Buddhist 'birds' are not isolated but rather live and evolve in a global Buddhist context.

Many Buddhist teachers and groups have tailored their messages and practices for modern (including modern North American) consumption. As the scholar of Buddhism David McMahan (2002: 219) explains, 'The re-envisioning of various forms of Buddhism in Western terms – more specifically, in terms influenced by the Western Enlightenment tradition – is an integral part of the story of Buddhism in the West.' Perhaps the most notable example, given Zen's long-standing popularity in the United States and Canada, is the 'repackaging' of Zen by D. T. Suzuki and others in order to offer 'an ahistorical essence of spirituality' well-suited for 'those disenchanted with what they saw as the failed promises of Western culture' (ibid.: 222). Other repackaged versions of Buddhism with significant North American followings include Shambhala (now headquartered in Halifax, Nova Scotia), Sōka Gakkai International, the *vipassanā* or insight meditation movement, and the reformist Chinese Buddhist groups Fo Guang Shan, True Buddha School, and Tzu Chi.



Figure 7.2 Buddhists meditating at San Francisco Zen Center

Two modern repackagings of the Dharma deserve special mention. The first is the global movement of socially engaged Buddhism that informs the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (headquartered in Berkeley, CA), Buddhist Global Relief (headquartered in Sparta, NJ), followers of the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thích Nhât Hanh, and many other North American Buddhist groups and individuals. Although socially engaged Buddhism draws upon Buddhist texts and history, it is a distinctly modern application of that heritage catalyzed by Western religious, political, and organizational influences (Queen 1996; Rothberg 1998; Queen 2002; Bhikkhu Bodhi 2009; Shiu 2010: 97–101). Secondly, the relationship between Buddhism and modern science has been explored in a variety of ways, including portrayals of Buddhism as the quintessentially scientific religion and/or the necessary corrective to science's materialist blind spots. Notable work in this area has been done by B. Alan Wallace of the Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies, Robert A. F. Thurman of Columbia University, the Stress Reduction Program founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and the Mind and Life Institute of Boulder, CO, whose honorary chair is the Dalai Lama.

The majority of North American Buddhists have always been Asian immigrants or refugees and their descendants. Each population group and historical cohort has unique experiences. For instance, Chinese and Japanese Buddhists are now several generations removed from the immigrant experience, while the migration experience is significantly more traumatic for refugees than for immigrants. Nonetheless, they all share certain dynamics, such as the first generation's travails of travel and challenges of adaptation to a new cultural context, tensions between the foreign-born and North American-born generations, and the negative realities of double minority status (racial and religious). The last have diminished since the 1960s, especially in Canada under its official multiculturalism policy, but suspicion of non-mainstream religions and anti-Asian sentiment persist. As the sociologist Russell Jeung observes, 'race continues to play a significant role in the lives of Asian Americans and their faith development' (cited in Numrich 2003: 66). The many scholarly studies of Asian North American Buddhist populations and temples document how Buddhism is being adapted or 'repackaged' through the interplay of local and transnational dynamics (e.g. van Esterik 1992; Cheah 2008; McLellan 1999, 2009), including reinterpretations of Buddhism in modernist terms and *vis-à-vis* Christian co-immigrants (Numrich 2005: 352; Chen 2008; Kim 2008).

Intergenerational challenges

The historian of American immigration Marcus Hansen investigated the intergenerational dynamics of immigrant populations, the title of his most influential work, *The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant* (Hansen 1937), indicating the

serious challenges involved. As noted in the previous section, tensions between the foreign-born and indigenous generations of Asian North American Buddhists are common and include negotiation of cultural identity from different vantage points:

> The later generations are frequently more American than their parents usually want, the immigrant generation still more traditional than their children can appreciate. Every immigrant generation fears that its offspring will forget their past. Every later generation wishes its parents could understand what it means to be born an American.'
>
> *(Numrich 2008a: xi)*

The valorization of individualism in North American society often fosters intergenerational conflict over dating and marriage, the foreign-born generation fearful of the negative moral influences of the larger culture and the consequences of exogamy. From the Nisei generation of Japanese Buddhists in the early twentieth century to the children of post-1960s Buddhist immigrants and refugees, significant institutional resources have been devoted to transmitting and adapting Asian cultural heritages to a North American context, such as Sunday schools, weekday programming, and summer camps (Mann, Numrich and Williams 2008: chapters 2, 3).

We can expand these insights about intergenerational challenges in immigrant and refugee communities to other Buddhist groups in North America. For instance, as the scholar of religion and culture Janet McLellan (2008: 41) notes, 'the issues second-generation Asian youth have with Buddhist leaders, hierarchy, organizational structures, and homeland orientation are similar to what has been observed among non-Asian groups as they attempt to "Americanize" Buddhist teachings and traditions.' Of the non-immigrant/refugee groups, Sōka Gakkai International (SGI) is perhaps best poised for the future as it 'has well-developed youth divisions that will presumably provide a new generation of leaders and administrators' (Seager 1999: 242). SGI Canada, for instance, has 'a very healthy number of very young (high school age and below) members,' many of them children of SGI members (Metraux 1996: 82, 84). In the United States, large numbers of SGI youth participated in the 2010 Rock the Era celebration of SGI's eightieth anniversary and SGI USA's fiftieth anniversary held in four cities (the Chicago event drew a reported 8500 participants and 2200 performers). In meditation centers of the Zen and *vipassanā* lineages, children's, youth, and family programming can also be found, such as Family Day at Green Gulch Farm Zen Center affiliated with San Francisco Zen Center and the Youth Outreach Program of Insight Meditation Society, Barre, MA. Giving voice to a new generation of Buddhists, Sumi Loundon (2001) set out to interview 'the young Buddhists of today who should be inheriting the dharma from older Buddhists' (xvi) and discovered that the generation gap is not as wide as many might think (199–203).

Rick Fields titled his chapter about American Buddhism in the late 1980s 'The changing of the guard' since the leadership of several Buddhist groups was transitioning from the original teachers. He quotes Thích Nhât Hanh's advice at a retreat in California: 'We should build Buddhism with the local materials' (Fields 1992: 377). This has included innovative applications of Zen by North American successors to Japanese teachers, such as Bernard Tetsugen Glassman and John Daido Loori, both students of Taizan Maezumi Roshi, founder of the Zen Center of Los Angeles in 1967. Shambhala is noteworthy for surviving controversial leadership in both its first and second generations in North America. Its innovative founder, Chogyam Trüngpa (d. 1987), was well known for his 'outrageousness and unusualness,' to quote his personal secretary (in Eldershaw 2010: 244), which often divided his followers. Trüngpa's own appointed successor, his American-born student Thomas Rich, engaged in promiscuous sexual behavior even after contracting AIDS. He was convinced to go into permanent retreat by a Tibetan Rinpoche and was eventually replaced by Trüngpa's eldest son, under whose leadership Shambhala 'has undergone a series of organizational and ideological adaptations in order to regain the trust of the wider sangha and to draw in much needed new membership' (ibid.: 248).

Organizational issues

In the Kālāma Sutta, the Buddha counsels people to 'know for yourselves' what is right and wrong without relying on other authorities, including one's own religious teacher. Many North American Buddhists see this text 'as espousing the agency of the individual, upon whose authority it places the evaluation of [religious] teachings' (Campbell 2010: 202). As suggested above, such a portrayal makes Buddhism an attractive option in the modern marketplace of religious ideas. Even so, individual practice usually takes place within an organizational context and thus involves issues of institutional authority, networks, and leadership.

Although Buddhists take refuge in the Buddha as their ultimate teacher, in practice they choose particular Buddhist teachers and/or lineages that suit their understandings of the Buddha's Dharma. Even those who follow an eclectic path make choices about what to include in their practice, while those who 'shop around' often settle on one path as most satisfying. This process may involve a calculus of attraction to a Buddhist teacher or lineage and dissatisfaction either 'with the options offered by the American religious mainstream' (Hammond and Machacek 1999: 113) or with other Buddhist options. Some research has suggested possible patterns among North American Buddhist converts, for instance that liberals seem attracted to Zen, conservatives to Theravāda, and individuals with mixed views to Sōka Gakkai (Numrich 1996: 119; Hammond and Machacek 1999: 113). The common organizational dynamics surrounding allegiance to or discontent with leadership can cause defections

or schisms in local Buddhist temples and centers. Social and legal incentives facilitate the proliferation of new organizations, as official multiculturalism has encouraged Buddhist multiplicity in Canada (McLellan 1999: 4, 218; Matthews 2002: 129–31), while America's 'lively experiment' with religious liberty has fostered remarkable growth in the number of Buddhist temples even in communities with limited resources (Numrich 2007: 94–6).

The institutional networks of North American Buddhism function on many levels, from the local to the transnational, and include relationships both among Buddhist groups and with non-Buddhist religious groups. Since about 1980, and continuing a global trend of inter-Buddhist cooperation that began in the late nineteenth century, several inter-Buddhist associations have been established in major North American metropolitan areas for the purposes of solidarity, mutual support, and promotion of the Dharma. These inter-Buddhist associations adopt a model of appreciation for the particularities of the various Buddhist lineages rather than attempt to forge a new amalgam (Numrich 1999). Inter-Buddhist efforts do not always succeed, however – the Canadian record is less impressive than the American, for instance (ibid.: 129; Shiu 2010: 94–7) – and it is likely that *intra*-Buddhist associations based on a shared lineage or denominational identity are the more common form of organizational networking for North American Buddhists (Numrich 2000: 192–94; cf. Numrich 1999: 131). Some Buddhist groups also participate in interfaith networks, but this does not seem to be a high priority in the United States (Numrich 1999: 136) and has elicited some animus among Canadian Buddhists (Matthews 2002: 134).

The sociologist of religion Wendy Cadge titled one chapter in her book on Theravāda Buddhism in the United States 'Observations through a gendered lens,' pointing up the importance of analyzing the ways in which 'gender structures and informs organizational cultures and activities' (Cadge 2005: 173). New understandings of gendered identity and relationships characterize the modern era and influence Buddhist groups and practices in North America, often enhancing women's involvement and agency (Boucher 1993; Cadge 2005: 189; Ho 2008; Perreira 2008). Even so, the number of women in organizational leadership roles and the quality of their interaction with male leadership vary from group to group. Half of the teachers in the *vipassanā* or insight meditation movement in the United States are women (Fronsdal 1998: 178) but many women leaders in other Buddhist lineages encounter patriarchal and institutional obstacles (Boucher 1993: 148–51; Geekie 2008: 221). Higher ordination as a *bhikkhunī* (nun) continues to be controversial in North American Theravāda circles. According to Tathaaloka Bhikkhunī of the Alliance for Bhikkhunīs, there are now approximately 20 to 25 *bhikkhunī*s in North America and at least ten temples with resident *bhikkhunī*s. Support is strongest among Sri Lankan *bhikkhu*s (monks) both in Sri Lanka, where many *bhikkhunī*s have been ordained since 1996, and in North America.

North American Buddhism in Modern Global Perspective

As noted at the outset of this chapter, the modern era is marked by powerful dynamics that produce both positive and negative life experiences for individuals and groups who nonetheless retain the capacity for creative and meaningful agency, often through religion. Like other religions founded in the premodern era (cf. Bellah 1970), Buddhism has successfully responded to modernity's challenges by providing a viable and globally adaptable world view and way of life, as exemplified by its remarkably diverse assemblage of sympathizers and adherents (both hyphenated and full-fledged) in North America. In many ways, North American Buddhism has come of age and will likely retain a significant place at a sometimes contentious multireligious table (Eck 2001; Beaman and Beyer 2008).

Enthusiasm about the 'New World' in general and notions of American exceptionalism in particular can produce lofty estimations of the role of North American Buddhism in the future of global Buddhism. For instance, at the 1997 Conference on the Future of Buddhist Meditative Practices in the West (Rapaport and Hotchkiss 1998), Robert Thurman cited the Japanese Buddhist scholar Gadjin Nagao's division of Buddhist history into four 'peaks,' the last occurring in the medieval period. Said Nagao, according to Thurman (1998: 460):

> There will be no fifth peak, unless it happens here in America.... Then, if you did it, it will reverberate back in Asia where Buddhism was, where people have the forms of Buddhism. But it will not be able to originate there in Asia. It will only happen here.

The truth of the matter is that Buddhism has entered its fifth peak in the modern era, with North America as one of many global sources of reverberation in the reaggregation of the religion.

Summary

- The histories of both modernity and contemporary North American societies have coincided from the beginning.
- The earliest North American attitudes included both intellectual interest in Buddhism and hostility toward Asian Buddhists.
- The first half of the twentieth century saw continued intellectual interest in Buddhism and hostility toward Asian Buddhists, the latter beginning to diminish during the Second World War.
- North American Buddhism has experienced unprecedented growth and diversification since the 1960s, drawing continued intellectual interest and less hostility toward Asian Buddhists.

- Counting and categorizing North American Buddhists are difficult tasks.
- Buddhism has been 'repackaged' by teachers and groups in order to adapt to modern contexts in North America and globally.
- Passing religious identities and practices on to later generations presents challenges to all Buddhist groups.
- Buddhist practice usually takes place within an organizational context and involves issues of institutional authority, networks, and leadership.
- North American Buddhism has come of age as a significant part of global Buddhism in the modern era.

Discussion questions

- The historical overview of North American Buddhism in this chapter covers three periods: the nineteenth century, the first half of the twentieth century, and the 1960s to the present. What stands out in each period as most important to the development of North American Buddhism?
- The topical overview of North American Buddhism in this chapter has four sections: demographics, 'repackaging' the Dharma, intergenerational challenges, and organizational issues. Which topic (or subtopic within a topic) strikes you as the most significant for the future of North American Buddhism?
- How have North American Buddhism and global Buddhism interacted? What role will North American Buddhism play in the future of global Buddhism?
- Some claim that Buddhism is well suited to the modern era. Based on what you know of North American Buddhism from this chapter, do you agree or disagree with such a claim?
- Conduct an Internet search of the most interesting individuals or groups in this chapter, with two questions in mind: a) How do they address modern issues? b) What are their global connections or influences?

Further reading

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A personalized chronicle of the experiences of Buddhist women leaders and practitioners.

Fields, R. (1992) *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*, third edn, Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc.

Although somewhat outdated and favoring certain Buddhist groups and practices, still the most interesting and readable overview of Buddhism in the United States.

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A significant new collection of essays on Canadian Buddhist groups and topics.

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An engaging account of the experiences of a new generation of Buddhists.

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Part One covers several Buddhist groups in the United States, Part Two addresses major topics in American Buddhism.

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Part two

Buddhism and the Challenges of Modernity

8 Buddhist Modernism

David L. McMahan

Introduction

The popular image in the West of Buddhism is of a religion or philosophy of life that emphasizes meditation, relaxation, exploration of the mind, and compassion. According to this image, it doesn't have strict rules, is undogmatic, non-ritualistic, encourages creativity and freedom of thought, is compatible with a modern scientific world view, and is itself more an inner science or 'spirituality' than a religion. It is democratic and espouses social and political freedoms, human rights, and environmental activism. If, however, Western seekers of Buddhism go to a typical Buddhist temple, monastery, or pilgrimage site in Asia, they are often surprised to see that the practice of Buddhism for most Buddhists entails many rituals, bowing before buddha images, and belief in mythical cosmology, magic, heavens and hells, and a plethora of unseen beings – buddhas, *bodhisattva*s, protector spirits, ghosts, and demons who respond to prayers, invocations, and offerings.

So how do we account for this apparent discrepancy? It would be easy to simply say that the Buddhism they learned in the West is just a misrepresentation that has nothing to do with 'real' Buddhism. But many Asian Buddhists – particularly the more educated, cosmopolitan, and affluent – also subscribe to the description above. While this articulation of Buddhism is not an adequate representation of the vast variety of Buddhisms in Asia as they have been practiced throughout many centuries, it does describe a new transnational genre of Buddhism that scholars have called 'Buddhist modernism.' This genre, I would suggest, is neither representative of the various forms of Buddhism that have been practiced in Asian for millennia, nor just a Western fantasy, but rather a hybrid religious and cultural form that combines selected elements of Buddhism with the major Western discourses and practices of modernity. Buddhist modernism, then, refers to the various forms of Buddhism that have been significantly shaped by an engagement with the dominant cultural and intellectual forces of modernity, such as the European Enlightenment, scientific rationalism, Romanticism and its successors, Protestantism, psychology, and modern social and political thought. Although influenced by the West, it is not simply 'Western Buddhism,' but rather a global network of movements created by both Asians and Westerners that is not the exclusive product of one geographic or cultural setting.

Uniquely modern features of Buddhist modernism that scholars have pointed out include the attempt to reinterpret or demythologize traditional cosmology in order to align the Buddhist world view with the modern scientific one; the de-emphasis on ritual, priesthood, and hierarchy; and a this-worldly bent that sometimes includes an activist element stressing social work and political involvement, as well as a philosophy of democracy and social egalitarianism. Some interpret such features as an example of Protestant influence on Buddhism and see modernist forms as a kind of 'Protestant Buddhism' (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). This influence also includes an interpretation of 'true Buddhism' to be found in texts rather than, for example,

in rituals or social practices, and tends to see things like spirit worship and fortune-telling as degenerate or superstitious. It also includes the 'individual's seeking his or her ultimate goal without intermediaries,' as well as 'spiritual egalitarianism,' individual responsibility, and self-scrutiny (ibid.: 216). The importance placed on the *saṅgha* (the community of monastics)[1] is diminished as the laity become more important. According to Donald Lopez, Buddhist modernism (or as he calls it, Modern Buddhism) 'stresses equality over hierarchy, the universal over the local, and often exalts the individual above the community' (Lopez 2002: ix). It also interprets the Buddha's original message as compatible with modern conceptions of 'reason, empiricism, science, universalism, individualism, tolerance, freedom and the rejection of religious orthodoxy' (ibid.: x). Buddhist modernism has much more active and visible roles for women than its predecessors, and its social location has often been among the educated middle class. Lopez sees it as a kind of transnational Buddhist sect, 'an international Buddhism that transcends cultural and national boundaries, creating ... a cosmopolitan network of intellectuals, writing most often in English' (ibid.: xxxix). This 'sect' is rooted neither in geography nor in traditional schools but is the modern aspect of a variety of Buddhist schools in different locations. Moreover, it has its own cosmopolitan lineage and canonical 'scriptures,' mainly the works of popular and semi-scholarly authors including figures from the formative years of modern Buddhism such as Soen Shaku, Anagarika Dharmapāla, Dwight Goddard, D. T. Suzuki, and Alexandra David-Neel, as well as more recent figures such as Shunryu Suzuki, Sangharakshita, Alan Watts, Thích Nhât Hanh, Chögyam Trungpa, and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

The Colonial period

The first moves in the 'modernization' of Buddhism were made, somewhat inadvertently, by Western Orientalist scholars in the nineteenth century. While many Western observers of Buddhism were repelled by what they claimed were its idolatrousness, superstition, and pessimism, some – particularly the translators and interpreters of early Buddhist texts such as Thomas W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) – began to portray Buddhism as a rational, psychological, and ethical philosophy of life. They saw the essentials of Buddhism as residing in its classical texts, from which they selected the writings on philosophy, ethics, and meditation as central, while ignoring the living traditions of Buddhism as peripheral and corrupted. Transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau, while limited in their understanding of Buddhism, also gave Buddhism a positive hearing in the West and praised it in their writings.

The first actual Buddhists to begin developing a distinctively modern reinterpretation of their tradition, however, were Asian reformers. Indeed Buddhist modernism began in a context not of mutual curiosity, cultural exchange, and open-

minded ecumenical dialogue, but of competition, crisis, and colonialism. If there is a single time and location of the origin of Buddhist modernism among Asian Buddhists, it is quite possibly Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in the nineteenth century, then a colony of Britain. Many of the unfavorable representations of Buddhism by Westerners at this time came from colonists who reported back to Europe on the beliefs and practices of Sinhala Buddhists (the ethnic majority in Ceylon/Sri Lanka). They often portrayed the Sinhalese as indolent, lazy, childlike, and lower on the evolutionary ladder than the supposedly enlightened Europeans. According to many European accounts, their religion was superstitious, nihilistic, incomprehensible, and in need of supplanting by evangelizing Christians. With colonial rule and its attendant missionary activity, therefore, Buddhism faced a crisis of legitimacy, having lost prestige and considerable economic and political power. It was largely in response to this challenge, not only of representation but also of real subjugation, that Sinhalese reformers began to rethink their own tradition. Revivalists – foremost among them Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864–1933) – began to reconstruct Buddhism along the lines of the more sympathetic Western Orientalist interpretation: as a rational, ethical philosophy in harmony with modern scientific knowledge and Victorian social mores.

One of the prominent and persistent assertions of Buddhist modernism is that Buddhism is more compatible with a modern, scientific world view than other religions, an assertion that goes back to the revitalization movements in Sri Lanka. Dharmapāla not only claimed that Buddhism was compatible with modern science but also suggested that the Buddha himself was a kind of scientist who internally discerned 'natural laws,' 'causality,' and evolution. This was an incisive polemic, considering that Christianity had been dealt serious blows by the implications of Darwin's theory of evolution, as well as modern theories of geology and biology. Notions of scientific causality, moreover, called into question literalist accounts of biblical creation, of a personal God who intervenes in the causal systems of nature, of angels, heaven and hell, miracles, and rising from the dead, all of which were under fire by an increasingly powerful scientific discourse. Indeed many in Europe and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were going through a period of profound religious doubt – dubbed by historians the 'Victorian Crisis of Faith' – in part due to the challenges of science and modern forms of knowledge.

Dharmapāla had no hesitation in exploiting this crisis to the advantage of his own tradition. Buddhism, he asserted, was a 'scientific religion containing the highest individualistic altruistic ethics' (Dharmapāla 1965: 25, 27), while the evangelical Christianity imposed on his country was 'political camouflage' whose motives were 'politics, trade and imperial expansion' and whose weapons were 'the Bible, barrels of whiskey and bullets' (ibid.: 439). He had full confidence in the viability of Buddhism over Christianity in the age of science:

> With the spread of scientific knowledge, Christianity with its unscientific doctrines of creator, hell, soul, atonement, will be quite forgotten. With the expansion of knowledge Europeans may come to know more of evolution, of the laws of causation, of the changing nature of all phenomena, of the divisibility of matter, of the progressive nature of the animal and human consciousness, then will Buddhism meet with a sympathetic reception.
>
> *(ibid.: 465).*

In addition to his emphasis on the compatibility of Buddhism and science, he also portrayed it as a religion perfectly suited to other challenges of the modern age, combating the Western representations of Buddhism as nihilistic, pessimistic, passive, ritualistic, and superstitious and promoting Buddhism as activist, optimistic, and ethical. He largely adopted the textualist reconstruction of his tradition offered by Orientalist scholars, proffering a rational Buddhism centered on the individual and his or her own salvation, as well as altruistic social service. He implicitly agreed with the Orientalists that the living Buddhism of his day was in a state of corruption and degeneration, and he was critical of many practices of his own people that could be interpreted as superstitious or ritualistic. In place of them, he attempted to codify a version of Victorian morals and decorum in the style of Buddhist monastic codes of behavior in order to reform the everyday behavior of the peasants (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 212–15).

Westerners sympathetic to Buddhism during this period were also instrumental in developing the foundations of Buddhist modernism. Many members of the Theosophical Society, an organization dedicated to uncovering the supposed esoteric truths hidden within all religions, were keenly interested in Buddhism. Theosophy grew out of the spiritualist movement, which attempted to investigate supernatural phenomena, contact the dead by use of mediums, and bridge the chasm between the human and spirit worlds. They considered this a fundamentally scientific endeavor – albeit an 'occult science' – using empirical research and rational arguments to prove auras, extrasensory perception, and the like. One of its most visible members, Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), was likely the first American to 'officially' convert to Buddhism. He also was very influential in promoting a view of Buddhism as scientific, rational, and ethical rather than superstitious, idolatrous, and backward. He formed the Buddhist Theosophical Society and joined forces for a time with Dharmapāla in an effort to promote and reform Buddhism in Ceylon and attempt to create a global Buddhist network.

By the early twentieth century, the image of Buddhism as a rational, empirical, ethical way of life free of ritual, dogmatism, and unscientific beliefs and cosmologies had become widespread. Western apologists such as Paul Carus boldly claimed that Buddhism is 'a religion which recognizes no other revelation except the truth that can

be proved by science' (Carus 1897: 114). The early Buddhist sympathizer C. T. Strauss likewise claimed that 'genuine Buddhism' is 'the reverse of mystical, rejects miracles, is founded on reality, and refuses to speculate about the absolute and other so-called first causes' (Strauss 1922: 105). Moreover, he asserted that it deems prayers, rituals, and ceremonies as 'not only useless but a hindrance to spiritual advancement' (ibid.: 53–4). On this interpretation, the Dharma of the Buddha was utterly distinct from the rituals, celebrations, image veneration, and attempts to control spirits common in the popular Buddhism that Westerners often found in lands they colonized.

D. T. Suzuki and Zen

Japan was another historical starting point for Buddhist modernism, especially modernist forms of Zen. Under the Meiji government, established in 1867, Buddhism was criticized as a corrupt and superstitious foreign religion that hampered Japan's scientific and technological advancement, as well as its national cohesion. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, several intellectuals began an attempt to revitalize Buddhism, purging it of what they considered corrupt cultural and institutional accretions and returning it to the original vitality of the Buddha's teachings. The movement they began, which drew heavily on Zen literature as well as Western philosophy, was known as 'New Buddhism,' or *shin bukkyō*. Proponents of the movement saw it not only as a response to government persecution of Buddhism but also as a way of promoting uniquely Japanese religion and national power in a transnational context fraught with economic and military competition. One influential philosopher sympathetic to this reformist Buddhism summarized the role he hoped Buddhism would play on the world stage in the early twentieth century:

> Everyone knows that we must look to the West to supply models not only for all kinds of commodities and utensils, but also for models of government, law, the military system, education, the physical sciences and technology. However, there is one thing that Japan can transmit to foreign countries and win fame: that thing is Buddhism
>
> *(quoted in Snodgrass 2003: 131)*

Among the most globally influential writers influenced by the New Buddhism movement was Daisetz Teitarō (D. T.) Suzuki, who vigorously promoted a modernized articulation of Zen Buddhism highly influential in the West. Drawing from ideas of religious experience found in the work of William James, Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō, and writers of the Romantic, Idealist, and Transcendentalist movements, Suzuki wrote that Zen in its essence was an *experience* that

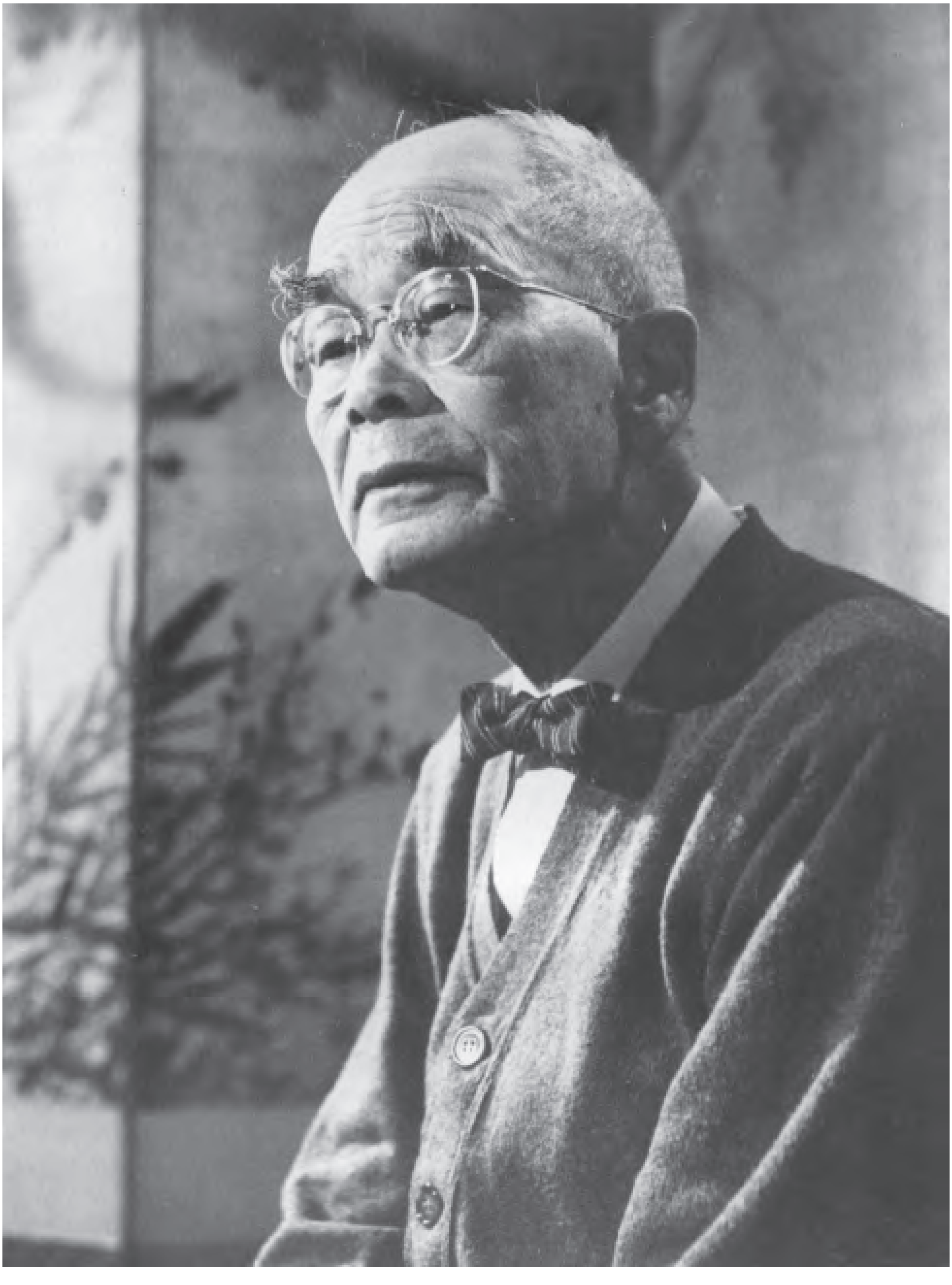


Figure 8.1 D. T. Suzuki

transcended the particularities of any religion. Not only was the liberating experience of *satori* the essence of Zen, it was the essence of all religion, though found in its purest form in Zen. Suzuki therefore de-emphasized not only Zen's intimate connection to the history of Buddhism but presented everything except the 'Zen experience' as peripheral. This emphasis on the authority of personal intuitive experience over tradition, ritual, and social life would become a prominent feature of some versions of Buddhist modernism.

In framing his presentation of Zen to Western readers, Suzuki articulated some of the difficult themes of Zen in the vocabulary of Idealist, Romantic, and Transcendentalist thinkers of the nineteenth century. He stressed, for example, the unification of the duality of subject and object in a transpersonal Absolute, a universal spirit or ultimate reality, using the language of German Idealists like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Friedrich Scheller. He also drew upon the Romantic conception of nature as an all-pervasive spirit that can be accessed by individual probing into the deep interior of the mind, as against the mechanistic Enlightenment view of the natural world as a giant machine. He also aligned the spirit of Zen with Romanticism's notion of spontaneity and the transcendence of rational, calculative thinking. The 'irrationality' of Zen *koan*s indicated a pure experience beyond conceptualization, emanating from a radical intuitive grasp of the oneness of the human being and nature. They, like the Romantics' view of poetry, spring from the direct experience of this intuitive apprehension of nature within. Suzuki also considered this intuitive grasp of reality the fount of art and creativity, positing a special relationship between Zen and the arts. The direct encounter with reality that Zen affords, and its associated spontaneity, constitute the source of creativity in all forms of art, as well as the everyday activities of life. This is where, according to Suzuki, 'all arts merge into Zen' (Suzuki 1959: 94). Intellectual reflection, calculation, anticipation, and a whole host of cognitive activities are set up in opposition to the intuitive, spontaneous, and creative act arising from a trained and nimble mind. For Suzuki, the great artist is nearly divine in his ability to tap into the mysterious depths of unconscious creative energy and bring it forth into the world.

Suzuki also promoted one of the common – if overly simplistic – tropes of Buddhist modernism: that the 'East' was intuitive, aesthetic, and spiritual, while the 'West' was technological, rational, and material. Such a dichotomy had been used previously by Orientalists, missionaries, and colonizers of Asia, for whom this characterization of the East signaled inferiority to the West. Suzuki accepted the basic East/West characterization but reversed the valuation, presenting the trans-rational, intuitive Zen practitioner as the superior of the rational, technological being of the modern West. He thus enfolded Zen into a pre-existing tension between two broad discourses in the West: between Enlightenment rationalism and scientific naturalism on the one hand, and Romanticism and Transcendentalism on the other.

We can see here glimmerings of how Buddhism and Zen came to be intimately associated with avant-garde art and experimental, improvisatory music and theater, and with the mid twentieth-century counter-culture in America. Indeed, this formulation of spontaneity and creativity explains in part why some counter-cultural artists, musicians and writers, such as some of the Beat poets, saw Buddhist practice as essential to their art. It also helps us understand why they often felt under little obligation to embrace traditional Buddhist morality since, following Suzuki, they believed that spontaneous activity in tune with nature transcended 'conventional morality.' Another broader result of Suzuki's formulation is that, particularly in the West, Buddhism – and meditation in particular – is conceived as something uniquely connected to creativity. Influential Buddhists in the West, such as Lama Govinda (1898–1985) and Sangharakshita (1925–) for example, have articulated similarly romantic-inspired explications of Buddhist art as flowing forth from the 'super-rational plane' (Sangharakshita 1973: 111–12). Avant-garde artists were directly influenced by Suzuki, for example John Cage (1912–92), who asserted that the purpose of art, poetry, and music was 'to sober and quiet the mind so that it is in accord with what happens' (Baas 2004: 166).

In framing Zen in these unprecedented terms, Suzuki called upon the tradition to speak to the concerns of the day and infused Zen into tensions between the rationalistic, scientific orientation predominant in modern Western culture and its counter-balancing force, Romanticism. Thus while many articulations of Buddhist modernism, as we have seen above, attempt to align Buddhism with scientific rationalism, there is also a strong strain of critique of the rational, scientific approach, and this critique parallels that of the Romantic vein in Western thought. This ambivalence toward science is also evident at the site of another intersection of Buddhism and Western modernity: the meeting of Buddhism and psychology.

Buddhist Modernism and Psychology

The interface of Buddhism and Western psychology has been one of the most prevalent frameworks of modern interpretation, especially in the West. Even the earliest revitalizers of Buddhism, such as Dharmapāla, and the early translators of its texts, such as Rhys-Davids, emphasized the psychological elements of Buddhism. Those who have drawn parallels between Buddhism and Western psychology have highlighted the sophisticated discussions of the mind and its functions in many canonical Buddhist texts and have explicitly connected them with various Western psychological schools of thought. This began in earnest in the mid twentieth century, when Western authors began to draw parallels between Buddhism and the psychoanalytic schools of psychology. The treatment of Buddhism as a psychology granted it considerable legitimacy in the West. Until the mid twentieth century,

for example, Tibetan Buddhism, with its large pantheon of deities, had often been presented in the West as degenerate polytheism and idolatry. Carl Jung provided another way to understand these figures. Jung interpreted them as expressions of universal psychological archetypes, i.e. facets of the collective unconscious shared by all human beings, indicating the primal structure of the human mind. 'The world of the gods and spirits is truly "nothing but" the collective unconscious inside me' (Jung 1960: liii). This reading has been especially compelling in the West, having been taken up by a number of scholars and becoming nearly the normative interpretation among popular writers, though few scholars still adhere to it. The twin traditions of scientific rationalism and Judaic and Christian prohibitions of idolatry made exorcizing the gods and demons from the world of atoms and molecules and confining them to the psyche necessary before Tibetan Buddhism could become a live option for Westerners.

This kind of reinterpretation is what some scholars have called 'demythologization,' the attempt to extract – or more accurately, to reconstruct – meanings viable within the context of modern world views from teachings embedded in ancient world views. Another example of the demythologization and psychologization of Buddhism is the interpretation of the realms of rebirth as psychological realities. Buddhist doctrine lays out six major realms into which beings may be reborn: those of humans, deities, hungry ghosts, animals, hell dwellers, and demigods. These have for centuries been taken as ontological orders of being into which all forms of life that have not achieved nirvana are born and reborn. Chögyam Trungpa, one of the most influential and westernized of Tibetan Buddhist teachers in North America, described these realms as 'predominantly emotional attitudes towards ourselves and our surroundings – reinforced by conceptualizations and rationalizations' (Trungpa 1976: 24). The realm of the deities, for example, was the human feeling of pride and self-absorption, the human realm represented passion, and the hell realm equated to 'hatred and paranoia.' While connecting the six realms with specific emotions or states of mind to be overcome has solid grounding in Buddhist textual traditions – beings are reborn in realms that provide karmic consequences of their actions of mind, body, and speech – the presentation of their significance as *primarily* or even exclusively psychological is uniquely modern. Such re-interpretation of cosmological-cum-ethical teachings is characteristic of the transformations of certain strains of Buddhism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is a part of a process of demythologization, one of the primary mechanisms in the modernization, revitalization, and re-invention of Buddhism and one of the ways that psychology has been important to modernist interpretations of Buddhism.

Another influential psychological interpretation of Buddhism is that Buddhist meditation, like psychoanalysis, opens up the unconscious to consciousness and in doing so frees the individual from destructive habits and repressed contents of mind. Psychologist Erich Fromm asserted that Zen meditation functions to make the unconscious conscious, not in the manner of psychoanalysis, which only seeks

to recover sectors of the unconscious that are the basis of symptoms, but rather in aiming for the 'full recovery of the unconscious' (Suzuki, Fromm and De Martino 1960: 139). While Freud believed that the best that psychoanalysis can do is make people somewhat less neurotic by revealing the unconscious bases for particular symptoms, Fromm saw Zen as pushing past the symptomatic treatment of neurosis toward the clearing away of all unconscious conditioning, allowing the emergence of the truly free individual. Under the influence of Jung and Fromm, the articulation of meditation in terms of analytic psychology has become a staple of popular Buddhist literature in the West. For instance, Douglas Burns, in his book *Buddhist Meditation and Depth Psychology*, identifies the traditional Buddhist mental defilements (*kleṣas*) with repressed emotions, and insight (*vipassanā*) with their de-repression:

> In its psychiatric usage insight means gaining awareness of those feelings, motives, and values which have previously been unconscious. Repressed feelings of guilt, fear, lust, and hatred may lurk in the hidden recesses of our minds and unconsciously shape our lives until such time as they are brought into awareness. And unless they are brought into awareness, we cannot effectively deal with them.
> *(Burns 1994)*

Similarly, contemporary psychiatrist Mark Epstein sees 'non-judgmental awareness' in meditation as akin to free-association techniques used by psychotherapists. Epstein concludes that Freud 'apparently taught himself without knowing that this was precisely the attentional stance that Buddhist meditators had been invoking for millennia' (Epstein 1995: 114). Following these and similar reflections, a great deal of contemporary Buddhist literature comes to see meditation and psychoanalysis as two species of essentially the same activity, the former being a more radical and thoroughgoing version of the latter. These mid twentieth-century intertwinings of Buddhism and psychology have paved the way to a contemporary abundance of literature bringing Buddhism into psychological theory and therapeutic practice.

Meditation and Modernity

Modernist interpretations of Buddhism, since their inception, have emphasized the centrality of meditation. Meditation has always been considered essential to enlightenment, but historically only a minority of Buddhists have undertaken it in any serious way. In most Buddhist cultures, meditation is considered the province of monastics specializing in the practice, who often live in forest hermitages or caves. Other monks, for example those specializing in scholarship or ritual, generally have not meditated, and among the laity the practice has been even more rare.

Modernist revitalization movements, however, reinvigorated the practice of meditation and, more radically, encouraged widespread lay practice. Meditation centers – neither monasteries nor traditional temples – catering to lay people began springing up in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia in the mid twentieth century and now are plentiful around the globe. Today throughout Asia as well as the West, many lay Buddhists and Buddhist sympathizers – not to mention Christians, Jews, Hindus, and secular people – practice various forms of Buddhist meditation and mindfulness techniques. While the practices of most Buddhists throughout the world still consist primarily of following its ethical precepts and performing rituals for gaining karmic merit, a growing number of educated, middle-class men and women now consider meditation essential to their practice of Buddhism. Contemporary Dharma teachers routinely invite people of all backgrounds to practice meditation and mindfulness for a wide variety of reasons, including increasing awareness, compassion, and peace of mind, and even enhancing their practice of other faiths. Meanwhile the practice has overflowed the boundaries of Buddhism itself and has been adopted by psychotherapists, medical doctors, and health club workers, as well as Christians and Jews. For monks specializing in meditation this practice is a means to overcome the cycle of rebirth or become a buddha, but this democratized and secularized meditation among the wider population may have many different functions, including stress reduction, attempting to attain a 'peak experience,' managing pain associated with an illness, overcoming psychological trauma, working more efficiently, or developing compassion in order to improve relationships with one's family and coworkers.

Some distinctively modern Buddhist movements occupy a sort of borderland between traditional Buddhist institutions and free-form spiritualities. The Insight Meditation or *vipassanā* movement, for example, emerged from the Theravāda traditions of Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, and Sri Lanka, but has become largely independent of institutional affiliation with monasteries and their structures of authority. In this movement, meditation is offered without most of the ritual, liturgical, and merit-making elements integral to Theravāda Buddhism. Americans such as Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, and Sharon Salzberg, who studied with Burmese and other Southeast Asian teachers, have made *vipassanā* especially popular in North America. The American *vipassanā* movement is largely independent of ties to Asian institutions, and there is no national body that certifies teachers, making the movement, as scholar and *vipassanā* teacher Gil Fronsdal puts it: 'inherently open, amorphous, and arbitrarily defined' (Fronsdal 1998: 165). This elevation of the role of meditation over merit-making, chanting, ritual, and devotion, however, is again not a simply a Western product. One of the most important founders of the modern *vipassanā* movement, the Burmese monk Mahāsi Sayādaw (1904–82), like many modern meditation teachers, focused

almost exclusively on the practice of meditation and the goal of awakening, de-emphasizing ritual and monasticism.

Meditation and the 'science of mind'

The centrality of meditation and the affiliations with psychology have paved the way to a recent reinvigoration of attempts to understand Buddhism, or at least Buddhist meditation, as either something akin to a science or something to be studied by science. Practitioners and sympathetic scholars have often made claims about the kinship of meditation and the scientific method. The German-born Theravāda monk Nyanaponika Thera (born Siegmund Feniger, 1901–94) in 1954 wrote of Buddhist meditation as a 'science of mind,' and presented the method of 'bare attention' as essentially the same as that of the scientist: 'unprejudiced receptivity' to things, reduction of the subjective element in judgment, and 'deferring judgment until a careful examination of the facts has been made.' This, he claimed, is the 'genuine spirit of the research worker,' though Buddhist meditation goes beyond 'explanation of facts' and a 'theoretical *knowledge* of the mind' to an attempt to shape the mind itself (Nyanaponika 1954: 42).

Contemporary *vipassanā* meditation teacher S. N. Goenka often refers to insight meditation as a scientific method of investigating consciousness and claims that the Buddha was not the founder of a 'religion' but an interior explorer who discovered truths about the mind that anticipate truths only recently discovered by scientists and psychologists in the West (Goenka 2007). Both science and Buddhism, according to this approach, are empirical means to establishing truths in their respective realms of investigation. Similarly, B. Alan Wallace asserts: 'Buddhist insights into the nature of the mind and consciousness are presented as genuine discoveries in the scientific sense of the term: they can be replicated by any competent researcher with sufficient prior training' (Wallace 2003: 8–9). Like scientific experiments, such discoveries derive from 'firsthand experience,' and the discoverers' claims 'are subject to peer review by their fellow contemplatives, who may debate the merits or defects of the reported findings' (ibid.: 9).

While these claims, and more generally the attempt to ally Buddhism and science, have met with skepticism in some quarters – from scientists, scholars of religion, and Buddhists themselves – there has been an explosion of scientific research on meditation in recent decades that, while not necessarily claiming meditation is itself scientific, sees it as something to be productively studied *by* scientists. These studies have employed some of the most advanced technology to study the effects of meditation on the brain and central nervous system. Recent research, for example, has assessed the effects of meditation on attention, perceptual sensitivity, anxiety, regulation of emotional states, neurophysiological responses to stressful stimuli,

immune system functioning, central nervous system activity, and specific neurological structures. Neuroscientists have used meditation to explore the possibilities of neuroplasticity – the ability of the brain to generate new cell and neural connections that change emotions, behavior, and perceptions – and to study attention and the processing of sensory information. Researchers at Harvard medical school have also asserted that meditation can increase immune function, help reverse heart disease, and reduce chronic pain. One study suggests that meditation can decrease depression and anxiety, and suppress the overproduction of stress hormones. Various kinds of Buddhist meditation also appear to be linked with brain activity in areas associated with feelings of happiness and well-being and diminishing of very negative emotions like hatred and anger.

It is unclear what the full implications of this contemporary conversation between Buddhism and science will have on the tradition. Certainly it increases Buddhism's cultural cachet among an educated global elite. Some, however, worry that an over-emphasis on scientific 'verification' of Buddhist techniques and insights could reduce the rich variety of practices and beliefs to those that fit a model of modern ideas of happiness, stress relief, and mental health. Others have voiced the more general concern that Buddhism is more than a scientific technique for happiness, but also includes social, ethical, and philosophical orientations that are generally neglected in the enthusiasm to make Buddhism fit with science, and meditation fit with modern psychological and physiological models of health (Lopez 2008, Verhoeven 2001; McMahan 2008).

Buddhist Modernism and Modernisms

There are many other examples that point to particular interpretations of Buddhism arising from the encounter of various Buddhist traditions with Western modernity. Certainly the phenomenon of Engaged Buddhism, a global movement that began in the 1960s during the Vietnam War and has grown considerably in recent decades, is one. It includes social and political activism oriented towards relieving suffering not just on a personal level but also on a wide, systemic scale, and adopts the language of modern social and political theory – of human rights, egalitarianism, individual freedoms, democracy – as well as techniques of nonviolent resistance and peaceful protest rooted in the modern era. There is also a global discourse among a great variety of Buddhists about ecological issues, which adapts concepts of interdependence and compassion for all sentient beings to contemporary environmental problems.

All of these developments are hybridized forms of Buddhism that have elements of Western modernity infused into them. But they should not simply be understood as mere accommodations to the West; as we have seen, some of these developments have selectively adopted certain modern Western ideas and practices as tools

to critique dominant features of modernity, for instance Western imperialism and materialism. In some cases, Buddhists have acquiesced considerably to the conditions and terms of Western modernity, but in others they have used elements of it for distinctively Buddhist ends. Moreover, though we have outlined certain key characteristics of Buddhist modernism – emphasis on rationality, ethics, meditation, science, creativity, activism, and increased participation by women and laity – we should not suppose that all Buddhist modernism looks alike. These themes are often adopted in unique ways particular to specific communities or schools of Buddhism, and some may take up certain of these tendencies but not others. Thus modernist forms of Buddhism in Sri Lanka look different from those of Tibetan communities in New York or India. Just as modernity itself is multiple, according to some theorists, with different cultures selectively appropriating, transforming, and localizing the conceptual, material, and political resources of modernity, so too the ways that Buddhists adopt various modern ideas, practices, and technologies may vary depending on a host of contingent factors.

For example, their relationships to the nations in which they reside and the role the state plays in determining legitimacy and shaping religion have had considerable impact on the shape of certain forms of Buddhism. The modernist Buddhisms that are developing in China in the wake of a relaxation of state prohibition of religion, for instance, reflect distinctively Chinese modes of modernity. They are much more managed and shaped by state involvement and have less rhetoric of individualism than Western Buddhist modernism. How ethnicity is construed may have a substantial influence on how any particular community of Buddhists adopts and adapts selected elements of modernity. The Chinese press, for example, tends to construct 'Chinese Buddhism' along rationalist lines similar to those we have discussed, while depicting Tibetan Buddhism as part of 'folk' culture. Such categorization in a place where the state has a strong managerial role in the conduct of religion has real consequences on the ground.

Other examples of modernist forms of Buddhism unique to particular places include, for example, rather ethnocentric nationalist iterations of Buddhism in Sri Lanka based on (re)creating a Sinhala Buddhist nation. In contrast to the more cosmopolitan Buddhist modernisms, this Buddhism fiercely critiques globalization and international forces as corrupting and emphasizes 'tradition.' Yet it also draws on previous attempts to interpret Buddhism as scientific in spirit and makes ample use of technology to propagate its ideas.

All of this suggests that we should be cautious about defining Buddhist modernism too narrowly or about positing a fixed distinction between modernity and 'tradition.' Like modern societies, modern Buddhisms are multiple and complex, and may have family resemblances without necessarily sharing any particular defining features.

Summary

- In the modern period, forms of Buddhism have emerged that combine traditional Buddhist teachings and practices with ideas, social forms, and cultural practices rooted in Western modernity.
- Buddhist modernism originated in the colonial period as various reform movements arose to counter threats from imperial power and missionaries.
- One facet of these movements involved the reinterpretation of Buddhism as a 'rational religion' compatible with modern science. Anagarika Dharmapāla was a pivotal figure in introducing this theme.
- Other forms of Buddhist modernism have emphasized personal experience, intuition, and art. D. T. Suzuki was especially influential in interpreting Buddhism along these lines.
- Especially in the West, Buddhist modernism has often involved interpretation of Buddhism in terms of Western psychology.
- Buddhist meditation has become more widespread and available not only to Buddhist laity but also to non-Buddhists.
- The latest trend in Buddhist modernism is the explosion of scientific research on meditation.
- Buddhist modernism cannot be considered just one well-defined thing; rather, it takes on different forms according to the different 'modernities' in various societies.

Discussion questions

- What is the difference between Buddhism that happens to exist in the modern world and Buddhist modernism?
- What are the distinctive features of Buddhist modernism, and how do they draw upon particular discourses of modernity?
- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of making connections between science and Buddhism?
- What would a critique of Buddhist modernism look like? Imagine this from (1) a scholar's perspective and (2) a Buddhist perspective.

Further reading

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Note

1 I use the term monastics to refer both to monks and nuns. More recently, the term *saṅgha* has expanded to include lay practitioners and even informal meditation groups.

9 Buddhism, Politics and Nationalism

Ian Harris

Introduction

The early Buddhist tradition was equivocal about the extent to which political activity is compatible with religious practice. On the one hand it had a powerful renunciatory strand that tended to regard worldly engagement as ultimately futile. The Buddha, for instance, is supposed to have renounced power in the most spectacular manner by giving up his opportunity to be a king and, instead, taking up the life of a wandering ascetic. Another important theme was the notion of mundane power as tainted. Thus in the Pāli *Brahmajāla Sutta* the Buddha exhorts his monks to avoid 'frivolous chatter, such as: talk about kings, thieves, and ministers of state; talk about armies, dangers and wars….' Such sources support the view, expressed by Weber and his disciples, that Buddhism '… perhaps presents the opposition to the spirit of politics in its most acute form' (Troeltsch 1923: 157). They also underpin the Chinese monk Huiyuan's *On Why Monks Do Not Bow Down Before Kings* (404 CE), a work arguing that the other-worldly status of Buddhist monks meant that they should not be required to kowtow to the emperor.

But we also know of early texts that are far more positively disposed towards the exercise of political power. In ancient India people without a king were compared to a river without water, so it is not surprising that some Buddhist writings extol the characteristics of the wheel-turning king (*cakkavatti*), a model of governance supposedly adopted by Asoka whom the later tradition came to recognize as the paradigmatic Buddhist ruler. But, as we have already noted, the future Buddha rejected his own kingly destiny. He also appears to have extolled the 'seven conditions of welfare' (*aparihānīyadhammā*) practiced by the Vajjians, a tribal republic flourishing in northeastern India during his lifetime.[1]

As if to reflect this, some early texts champion a form of polity based on election and social contract between ruler and ruled rather than the idea of absolute dynastic succession associated with the *cakkavatti*. We should not, therefore, assume that early Buddhism was wholeheartedly enthusiastic about monarchical government, or that it held only one form of polity to be consistent with the flourishing of the teachings. This, in part, explains why Buddhism continues to be practiced in societies organized under a variety of political arrangements – constitutional monarchy (Thailand and Cambodia), rightist military dictatorship (Burma/Myanmar), socialist republic (Lao PDR), parliamentary republic (Mongolia), as well as under various forms of colonial rule.

Early Buddhist literature, furthermore, acknowledges that problems inevitably arise in the exercise of power. Exhortation and admonition of poorly performing rulers is a common theme in the *Jātaka* literature. The *Gaṇḍatindu Jātaka*, for example, tells the story of a wicked king whose unjust and careless rule causes great suffering. The *bodhisattva*, reborn as the spirit of a *gaṇḍatindu* tree, admonishes the king by magically appearing in his royal bedchamber. Suitably chastened, the king tours his kingdom

in disguise, rapidly confirming the truth of the future Buddha's words, repenting and devoting the rest of his life to the exercise of good governance.

We also know that the Buddha included a number of rulers in his circle of disciples. Bimbisāra, king of Magadha, was pre-eminent among early Buddhism's patrons. He strove to support the *dhamma* so successfully that he is said to have achieved 'stream-entry' (*sotāpanna*). But Bimbisāra's son, Ajātasattu, plotted his father's downfall. Ajātasattu subsequently felt ashamed of his evil actions and sought the advice of the Buddha. With great 'fear and trembling' he made his way to the latter's dwelling place where he received the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* and repented the heinous crimes of patricide and regicide.

In the Buddhist political imagination the ideal ruler was supposed to be a supporter of Buddhism (*sāsana dāyakā*), but the historical record demonstrates very clearly that the *sāsana* has often been obliged to operate in far less propitious circumstances. The best we can say is that an antagonistic symbiosis between spiritual and worldly power best characterizes those Buddhist cultures for which we have the most reliable historical records.

Towards the Modern Period

Karl Jaspers regarded the Buddha as a key figure in the unfolding of a so-called 'axial age,' a unique '... pause for liberty, a deep breath bringing the most lucid consciousness' sandwiched between long periods marked by arbitrary and absolutist power. This notion that Buddhism marked a step forward in rationality and human freedom, understood in political terms, has been enthusiastically taken up by modern Buddhists.

> For the first time in human history the dignity of man was raised to heights never known before. The chains of bondage to humans and gods were shattered and the bugle of human freedom loudly sounded up to the highest heavens.
>
> *(Soni 1954: 24).*

But when we look for historical evidence in support we run into difficulties. As far as we can tell, relations between the Buddha and contemporary monarchs were largely the same as those he maintained with other members of the laity. He responded to their questions and offered them wise counsel, but he did not pretend to give advice on how they should conduct their kingly duties. Furthermore, he was not overly proactive in dissuading them from initiating wars, or committing acts of injustice and criminality. Subsequent defences of his actions have been based on the notion that such criticism would have been unproductive, only inflaming these rulers' crueller proclivities (Bareau 1993: 38). But there is no getting away from the fact the Buddhism

has often been an uncritical collaborator with states whose record of governance fell well short of that envisaged in the 'axial age narrative.'

To give one brief instance, in 1950 U Chan Htoon, the Attorney-General of Burma, claimed that 'Buddhism is the only ideology which can give peace to the world and save it from war and destruction,'[2] and the romantic discourse of Buddhism as a peaceful religion is now very well established and rarely subject to critical scrutiny.[3] This is especially so among the Tibetan diaspora and its supporters, who have successfully managed to rewrite history to make it seem as though the Tibetan resistance to China has been purely non-violent (Norbu 1994: 188, 193). The Fourteenth Dalai Lama nicely symbolizes the tension. In 1989 he was memorably awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet in the *Song of the Queen of Spring*, a dynastic history composed in the seventeenth century by that same individual's fifth incarnation, we find praise for a monk who killed the anti-Buddhist king gLang dar ma and applause for the bloody military exploits of Gushri Khan who is described as an emanation of the important Buddhist protector deity, Vajrapāṇi (Maher 2008: 184, 187).

Monastic militancy is another recurring feature of the early modern period. From the Burmese sack of Ayutthaya in 1767 to the establishment of the Chakri dynasty in 1782 civil war raged in Siam. Among the combatants, clans of monks proficient in the use of swords and guns attempted to carve up the country. Chao Phitsanulok of Fang with a following of red-robed monastics, for example, managed to establish a short-lived independent state in the north. Similar phenomena are attested in Cambodia. In 1820 a monk named Kai was proclaiming a vision of a millennial future free of Vietnamese influence. In due course he rebelled against the feeble monarchy, temporarily establishing himself as king at the sacred mountain of Ba Phnom. A more serious revolt of 1865–7 against king Norodom and his French 'protectors' was incited by a certain Po Kambo, a former monk falsely claiming royal descent, with a following of some 10,000 including monks in robes and various holy men (*neak sel*). Having rallied support at Phnom Penh, Po Kambo finally met his death when pursued to the centre of a lake and beheaded (Harris 2005: 131–2).

There has been a tendency to interpret almost all acts of monastic militancy of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as early manifestations of organized anti-colonialism. Indeed, some left-wing historians and activists came to regard such events as 'people's rebellions' even where there is little hard evidence that they represented 'progressive elements' within society. We must be careful not to impose later ideas on events. Contemporaries actually regarded figures like Po Kambo as 'awful persons [who] ... incite poor people and forest people to raise up an army to betray the king.' From this perspective, they were condemned for setting themselves up as a king, or for committing *lèse-majesté*. Indeed, it looks very likely that many insurrections were actually led by people who resented the loss of their traditional privileges or by pretenders to the throne.

Leaders of such movements were also animated by the ideal of freedom from a foreign yoke, and most modern Cambodian uprisings had an anti-Vietnamese or anti-French dimension, although older antipathies towards Siam also existed. This is also an element in the career of Saya San, a Burmese rebel against the British in the early 1930s. During the previous decade rumours circulated that colonial police and soldiers had been seen kicking and even urinating on Buddha images, and this fed into a generalized desire to protect the *sāsana* as expressed, for example, in the 1926 conference of the General Council of Sangha Samaggi (GCSS) in Meik-hti-la attended by a great multitude including some 20,000 monks.

Now, the leaders of earlier rebellions in Burma had tended to claim royal blood. Alaùng-hpayà (1714–60), founder of the Konbaung dynasty, for example, maintained that he was an embryo of the Buddha in possession of all of the weapons of a *cakkavatti*. Although Saya San made no claims of royal descent, he did take the title of Thupannaka Galon Raja on 28 October 1930, undergoing a temporary ordination at around the same time (Smith 1965: 108). His followers believed him to be a *Buddha yaza* – the avenging king spoken of in Burmese folklore and, at his trial, Saya San certainly claimed that his rebellion was intended to benefit monks, and the inhabitants of Burma, but, most importantly, '... the interest of the religion of Our Lord [i.e. Buddha]' (Mendelson 1975: 208).

Benda has characterized the Saya San rebellion as a retrogressive '... cosmological attempt to exorcise the foreigner by recreating the traditional Burmese monarchy in a jungle clearing' (Benda 1965: 428). As such, he was the last in a long line of royal pretenders who emerged after the British took control of the entire country in 1886. Other commentators have sought to stress Saya San's modernist, as opposed to traditionalist, credentials. He certainly had connections with the village nationalist associations (*wun-tha-nú athin*) that had dominated the political scene in the years leading up to the rebellion. He also appears to have been influenced by Buddhist preaching manuals, such as C. P. Hkin Maung's *Wu-tha-nú Ret-hkí-tá* (Nationalist Principles) of 1924 designed to help local speakers formulate a new style of political nationalism 'in accordance with the Buddha's wishes.' Such works promoted a 'medicine of bravery' through the chanting of mantra-like phrases, 'Who is it that we must not fear – the English, the English.' They also contained explicitly Buddhist slogans of the type, 'There is a saying that even ... Mount Meru can topple. Today we are not going to topple Mount Meru, but the chicken coop [i.e. the British gaol].'

Fresh light on the difficulties entailed in the characterization of such events – are they best understood as efforts to return to a previous unsullied past or genuinely progressive attempts to construct a new sociopolitical order? – has been shed in an important recent article by Goldstein, Jiao and Lundhup (2008) examining the motivation behind a violent episode organized by an ex-Tibetan nun during the Cultural Revolution. In 1968 Trinley Chödrön was an uneducated 30-year-old nun

forced to return to the lay life. However, she continued to burn incense and no-one felt it necessary to stop her because she was considered insane. For example, she claimed to be possessed by Jowo Rinpoche, the Shakyamuni Buddha of the Jokhang temple in Lhasa, and by an aunt of the mythical King Gesar. It seems that two Red Guard groups, Gyenlo and Nyamdre, were vying for power in the area and in November 1968 the nun persuaded her village followers to fight in support of the former grouping. In the murder and mayhem that followed some scholars have detected a 'millenarian uprising.' But Goldstein and his co-workers urge caution. Having examined a vast quantity of documentation and witness testimonies, they conclude that the rationale for the uprising must be sought within the previously mentioned power struggle and that there is no evidence to suggest a religious, let alone a Buddhist, motivation behind the violence.

Anti-Colonialism and Nationalism

Having acknowledged the difficulties involved in ascribing motivation to the leaders of Buddhist-tinged rebellions of the past, it can be no coincidence that an anti-colonial element is present in the activities of Po Kambo, Saya San and Trinley Chödrön. In some cases the colonial power was European, either French or British, but in others the sense of grievance was located closer to home. The brutal Japanese annexation of Korea from 1910 until the end of the Second World War is relevant here.

Han Yongun (1879–1944), a Korean Buddhist monk, had travelled to Japan in 1908 to study at Sotoshu University (Park 2005: 95). He soon became interested in reconciling Mahāyāna philosophy with the reformist thinking of the late Qing political thinker, Liang Qichao, and in 1913 he published *On the Revitalization of Korean Buddhism (Chosŏn Pulgyo Yusinnon)*, a work in which he claims that 'the world of the future will be called "world of Buddhism"... [b]ecause it will be equal, because it will be free, and because the world will achieve great unity.'[4]

Despite the fact that both Korea and Japan shared a Buddhist heritage, Han Yongun was to become one of the leaders of Korea's March 1st independence movement in 1919. In consequence he served a short prison sentence, but from 1924 he served as chairman of the Korean Buddhist Youth League and became increasingly influenced by Kropotkin's anarchist conception of mutual help, which he seems to have associated with the Buddhist notion of 'universal love.' He also extolled the Buddhist *saṅgha* as a social institution grounded on the concept of the communal ownership of property and fundamentally at odds with the acquisitive instinct. For related reasons he also opposed capitalist exploitation, imperialism, inequality, and war.

Han was insistent that Buddhist influences were so all-pervasive in his native land that 'the spirituality of Korean people is Buddhist.' But he also noted that the isolation of the *saṅgha* in remote locations far from the major centres of population – a state of

affairs established by anti-Buddhist Confucian politics of the Joseon period – meant that Buddhism needed to reconnect with the people, writing that 'Buddhism is not a religion only for mountain temples or monks.' Like the Chinese Buddhist reformer Taixu (1890–1947), his almost exact contemporary, Han argued that temple assets should be consolidated into a communal fund to help develop a socially concerned, or humanistic, Buddhism that would be able to more successfully grapple with the problems facing the Korean people.

In a limited sense, the identification of the fate of specific ethnic groups with Buddhism is not a new phenomenon. In the thirteenth century the Japanese monk Nichiren (1222–82) was concerned to establish his country as the ordination platform (*kaidan*) of the entire world. He also wrote *Risshō ankoku ron* ('The Establishment of Righteousness and the Pacification of the Country') in 1260, a work specifically designed to use Buddhism as a means to protect the country from natural disaster and Mongol invasion. Nevertheless, it is clear that a forging of links between Buddhism and the newly emerging nation-state was to become an important factor in the modern history of Asia. We have already seen how Han Yongun claimed a special connection between Buddhism and the Korean people, and similar formulations can be found in other culture settings at around the same time period.

Thus the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) in Burma, itself an important forcing ground for fledgling nationalists, first coined the slogan, 'To be Burmese is to be Buddhist' (*Boudda bhatha Bama lumyo*) in the 1930s. Admittedly, mantras of this sort may have negative connotations, not least because not all Burmans, nor all the inhabitants of Burma/Myanmar, are Buddhist. But this fact has not prevented Burma's most prominent and internationally admired politician, Aung San Suu Kyi, from repeating it approvingly in more recent times (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991: 83).

Nationalist Monk Heroes

U Ottama (1879–1939) was the first prominent nationalist monk in Burma. Having excelled in his early monastic training, he moved to Calcutta to complete higher Buddhist studies. His period in India coincided with the 1904 anti-British agitations, and his anti-colonialist outlook was amplified a year later when he heard of the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese war. To his mind the Japanese, like the Burmese, were physically small rice-eating Buddhists, yet they had defeated a Western power. Similar attitudes were found across Asia. The polymath Hindi writer, Indian nationalist and occasional Buddhist monk, Rahul Sankrityayan, interpreted the Japanese victory as an example of how the use of Buddhism as a vigorous means of national defence contrasted favourably with the extreme non-violence of the tradition's earlier manifestations that had eventually resulted in its uprooting in the land of its birth (Sankrityayan 1938: 344).

U Ottama spent a short time in Japan working as a teacher and then traveled widely in Asia before returning to Burma in 1911. From the early twenties he wrote, preached widely and, basing himself on Gandhi's philosophy of non-cooperation, urged the wearing of homemade cloth and the boycotting of foreign products. He also encouraged the participation of women in politics. U Ottama's politically engaged Buddhism deferred the ultimate achievement of *nirvana* to the remote future by redefining salvation in a this-worldly sense: '*Pongyis* [i.e. monks] pray for Nirvana but slaves [i.e. the Burmese people under colonialism] can never obtain it, therefore they must pray for release from slavery in this life.'[5]

A frequent contributor to newly emerging media, such as the newspaper *Thuriya* (The Sun), U Ottama's most famous piece was an open letter to the British Governor entitled 'Craddock Go Home,' prompted in part by the latter's contemptuous remark that so-called 'political *pongyis*' were sacrificing '... the veneration of the ages for the nine days' applause of a gaping multitude' (Maung Maung 1980: 15). U Ottama also accused the British of having enchanted the Burmese into regarding themselves as an inferior race, and there was a decidedly anti-Christian strain in some of his utterances (Mendelson 1975: 223). Following a series of speeches made during a period of anti-colonialist tension he was arrested in October 1924 with a number of fellow monks. At their trial they refused to stand before the judge and U Ottama was sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

In the light of U Ottama's popularity the British pressured Burma's chief ecclesiastic, the *thathanabaing*, to issue a ruling to the effect that monks' involvement in politics was contrary to the *vinaya*. But the ruling was ignored by many younger members of the *saṅgha* and the *thathanabaing* was castigated for being an instrument of British religious policy. Moreover, U Ottama had argued that political activity was not against monastic discipline and that it could be conducted within the vinaya rules. Indeed, the '... *saṅgha* should not ignore the suffering of the people while they concentrated single-mindedly on their spiritual benefit.'

Meanwhile, in East Asia, the collapse of the Qing dynasty had prompted Chinese nationalists to see the benefits of playing the Buddhist card. Leading figures in the Republic of China (ROC) rapidly realized that Buddhism was far too integral to the cultures of Tibet and Mongolia for them to be easily susceptible to Chinese nationalist ideology. As a result, a positive orientation towards Buddhism became part of their exercise of statecraft. A 'Respect Princes and Dukes and Revere the Living Buddha' (*zunzhong wanggong congxing huofuo*) policy was promoted by Sun Yat-Sen's secretary, Dai Jitao, who encouraged the Ninth Panchen Lama to preach and perform tantric nation-protecting rituals both in China and in Inner Mongolia, where a Kalacakra ceremony held in April 1929 is said to have attracted 70,000 participants. Dai also tried to stem Japan's attempt to become the center of world Buddhism by identifying China as

> ... the leader of nations of Asia ... [having i]nternally the regions of Mongolia, Tibet, Qinghai and Khams and externally the regions of Indo-Burma, Thailand and Indonesia – these nations are united really by having Buddhism as their centre. [If] we don't respect Buddhism, who will respect us?
>
> *(quoted in Bulag 2006: 274)*

Yuan Shikai, President of the ROC, quickly awarded new titles and a handsome salary to the Sixth Janggiya Khutughtu (Tib.: Lcang skya, 1891–1958), the most senior monk in Inner Mongolia, who immediately endorsed the new state and assured the authorities of his loyalty. But because the Janggiya Khutughtu did not want to come under the authority of the more senior Jetbsundampa Khutughtu based in Outer Mongolia, he opposed the rise of the fledgling Mongolian nationalist movement with which the latter was associated. However, when the former felt obliged to kowtow to Chinese officials and to make an act of personal reverence to the Chinese flag, the Mongols revolted, and a short-lived and independent People's Government with the Jetbsundampa Khutughtu as a constitutional monarch, styled the Bogd Khan (Holy Khan), was declared on 29 December 1921 (Bulag 2006: 265–7).

When the Bogd Khan died in 1924 the country became a republic, and the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), which had been anti-clerical from its inception, moved in a thoroughgoing anti-religious direction. Despite the resistance of many high-ranking lamas, Mongolia was quickly to become the locus for one of the worst large-scale atrocities directed against the Buddhist *saṅgha* in modern times. This brutal campaign was launched in February 1929 when the authorities also denounced the Panchen Lama as a tool of Japanese militarism. The Panchen Lama continued to support rebellious lamas and wrote letters claiming that he would appear in Mongolia to personally smash the people's revolution, but the final suppression of Buddhism began in 1932 and by the time the purge finished in 1939 a total of 20,356 lamas had been killed. [6]

Buddhism would also play a significant role in less immediately obvious nationalist projects. Although it had been virtually extinct in the land of its birth for many centuries, Nehru, never a practicing Buddhist, was to borrow the image of the eight-spoked wheel of Dharma (*dharmacakra*) for the flag of newly independent India while the Asokan lion-capital appeared on stamps, passports and the national currency. The Buddha remained the country's earliest and most influential historical figure. Indeed, when the relics of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, the Buddha's two principal disciples, were returned to India – they had been removed from Sanchi in 1851 and deposited in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London – and enshrined in their former home, Nehru declared that 'it may be that here in Sanchi we are reaching a turning point in history.'[7]

Buddha Jayanti and Communism

The year 1956–7 was especially auspicious since it was the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment (*Buddha jayanti*), and large-scale celebrations took place across most of Buddhist Asia. In Sri Lanka, for example, a council was convened at which monks chanted the entire Tripitaka, plans were made to translate the Pāli canon into Sinhalese, and Dr G. P. Malalasekera, an influential scholar and diplomat, was appointed editor in chief of a new *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* project. Malalasekera was also President of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), and at the 1956 WFB conference, held in Lumbini, he suggested that the organization should expand its activities to include Buddhist cooperation on international political issues, and the development of ideas concerning the creation of a Buddhist welfare state (Kloppenborg 1977: 309).

Malalasekera already had an impressive track record in the endorsement of Buddhism within the political sphere, so much so that the Americans were soon to characterize his desire to promote Buddhism 'as an alternative to Communism and to Western Imperialism' as both 'anti-Christian [and] anti-Western.'[8] He had unsuccessfully agitated to hold an inquiry into the state of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in 1951, but by the time of the *Buddha jayanti* he and his associates decided to set the thing up anyway. A committee was established in April and its final report, *The Betrayal of Buddhism*, condemned the treatment of the country's ancestral faith during the colonial period and called, among other things, for the creation of a Ministry of Religious Affairs, the declaration of *poya* days as public holidays, the prohibition of alcohol and horse-racing, and the creation of training colleges for prospective ordinands. So significant was the publication of *The Betrayal of Buddhism* that Sri Lanka soon came close to being re-established as a Buddhist state. Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, who had come to power in an upsurge of Buddhist nationalism, was assassinated, and a long and bitter civil war broke out between the Buddhist Sinhalese and the island's Tamil Hindu minority.

In the late 1920s Tseveen Jamtsarano (1880–1942), a Buryat Buddhist scholar who had risen to be a leading figure in Mongolia's Communist Party, had written of the possibility of creating a Buddhist-Marxism synthesis:

> What our Lord Buddha taught cannot be equated with aggressive religions like Mohammedanism and Christianity, and though the communist party rejects religion and the priesthood, this has nothing to do with our Buddhist Faith. Our Party wants to see the Buddhist Faith flourishing in a pure form, and approves of lamas who stay in their lamaseries, reciting the scriptures and faithfully observing their vows.[9]

For several decades similar ideas circulated in most regions of Asia.

In mid 1940s Sri Lanka, for example, a small group of Marxist-oriented monks rose to prominence. Most had studied in India, had been influenced by the Indian nationalist movement, and supported leftist candidates in the 1947 national elections. Walpola Rahula (1907–95), author of the enormously influential *Urumaya* (*Heritage of the Bhikkhu*, 1946) – a work that extols the significance of the socially engaged monk – was the most prominent of the group. In the mid 1950s he supported the 'Buddhist socialism' of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike before becoming increasingly conservative and chauvinistic (Tambiah 1993: 592–3).

Comparable accommodations between Buddhism and Marxism occurred in Siam. In 1933 Pridi Phanomyong (1900–83), who would become Prime Minister of Thailand a little over a decade later, wrote of a future in which the Thai people '… will be able to feast on the fruits of happiness and prosperity in fulfilment of the Buddhist prophecy to be found in the story of Ariya Mettaya' while his book, *Impermanence of Society* (1957), represents an attempt to synthesize Marxist and Buddhist ideas in which the notion of impermanence (*annicang*) dominated. Samak Burawat, a teacher of philosophy at Mahamakut University, was another example. His attempt to transform Buddhism into a 'universal knowledge' (*wicha sakon*) through its integration with Marxism and Social Darwinism resulted in books such as *Panya* ('Intellect,' 1954) and *Witthayasatmai kap phrasi-an* ('The New Science and Mettaya Buddha,' 1970). Meanwhile in the late 1940s Burma members of an 'Association of Marxist Monks' saw the advent of socialism in the region as ushering in the age of the *cakkavatti*. Others interpreted it, in possibly messianic terms, as the time for the emergence of the future Buddha, Maitreya. Indeed, by the mid 1950s U Nu, the country's strongly Buddhist Prime Minister, was still arguing that greed, hatred and delusion were the causes of the 'accumulation of capital,' and he never repudiated the economic doctrines of Marxism.

Around this time the US government, becoming increasingly concerned about the radicalization of certain sections of the Buddhist *sangha*, began to take measures to counteract the threat. The Yahan Byo Ahpwe (Young Monks' Association) became a focus for opposition to communism, and a prominent member, U Kethaya – the so-called 'American *pongyi*,' wrote a number of pamphlets on the topic funded by the Ford Foundation.[10] But it is the appearance of a short work entitled *Dhammantarāya* ('Buddhism in Danger,' 1959) that sought to create an alliance between the military and the monkhood. Published by the government's Psychological Warfare Department and funded by the Amery Psychological Warfare Directorate, it marks the zenith of anti-communist rhetoric in Burma.

However, the most prominent Buddhist cold war warrior appeared somewhat later in Bangkok. Kittivuḍḍho Bhikkhu (1936–) rose to prominence after the October 1973 student uprising. It is claimed that accounts of the Khmer Rouge destruction of Buddhism in Cambodia influenced him in a strongly anti-communist direction.

A famous speech given by Kittivuḍḍho in June 1976 was subsequently published as a pamphlet entitled 'Killing of Communists is not Demeritorious,'[11] which tries to justify certain forms of killing on the basis of the *Kesi Sutta* (A. ii. 112f). In due course Kittivuḍḍho's position came under sustained criticism and the ecclesiastical authorities were reluctantly forced to act against him. However, on August 11, 1976 it was announced that there was insufficient evidence for him to be condemned, and he escaped even the mildest of rebukes.

Buddhist Socialism

When U Nu took office as Burma's Prime Minister in the late 1940s he announced that if he failed to do his duty he should be reborn in hell. He envisaged the creation of a new era in which both governed and government could live in harmony. U Nu's resulting *Pyidawtha* (literally, 'pleasant royal country') plan, launched in 1952, would involve a Buddhist revival including the promotion of meditation throughout the country, a state-supported expansion of Buddhist education, attempts at better regulating and supporting the monastic order, the establishment of Buddhism as the religion of the Burmese state, and the initiation of a great Sixth Buddhist Council (*sangayana*) to coincide with worldwide celebrations of the *Buddha jayanti*.

To get the ball rolling the Kaba Aye Pagoda or 'world peace pagoda' was constructed to house the Council at a site a few miles north of the famous Shwedagon. When the work was finished in March 1952 relics of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana were deposited within, and from this magical place peace vibrations would radiate out across the country and ultimately throughout the world. At the commencement of proceedings U Nu ordered an amnesty of prisoners. Death sentences were also commuted in line with Buddhist ethics. But by 1955 it was becoming clear that the Burmese government's economic policies were hopelessly unrealistic, and U Nu was obliged to look to international capital for assistance. He did not abandon his overall policy, which he called 'Buddhist socialism,' partly because he believed it would keep dictatorial communism at bay. It also seems that this political philosophy was premised on the notion of 'earthly nirvana' (Burmese: *loki nibbana*) a term not found in the Tripitaka but first used in a speech delivered at a ceremony to dedicate a statue to U Wissara in October 1943.

U Nu was not alone. The notion of Buddhist Socialism was also to flourish briefly in early 1960s Cambodia. After that country's independence from France, king Norodom Sihanouk saw the need to revolutionize the monarchy and to link the people to a conception of government that combined both conservatism and social economic reform. This 'third' or 'middle' way solution was achieved through Sihanouk's abdication and creation of the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* (People's Socialist Community). In his view the Buddha had recognized that not everyone has the capacity to attain



Figure 9.1 Cambodians go to the polls to vote for the ruling Sangkum Party (June 1962)

nirvana and that his teaching was not just for those with such capabilities. In a sense then, Buddhism has always been 'engaged Buddhism.'

The Sangkum did much to promote the ideal of voluntary manual labor, a cooperative enterprise that Sihanouk connected back to the glories of Angkorian civilization. Like U Nu, Sihanouk was anxious to differentiate his political outlook from communism, claiming that in

> ... a communist country people work without respite day and night ...Women and old people cannot remain inactive ... human life is of little importance. Cambodia is faithful to the worship of the Buddha. It is thus impossible for us to accept such a regime.'
>
> (quoted in Schecter 1967: 65)

He also observed that neither Thailand nor Southern Vietnam were independent. The former was obliged to host US military bases on its soil while the latter was witnessing a bloody conflict between the 'free' world and the communist bloc.

Towards an Explicit Buddhist Politics

The experiments in Buddhist Socialism in Burma and Cambodia both failed. They may have been methodologically flawed, but circumstances also conspired against them. In Burma, forces whipped up by U Nu's attempts to establish Buddhism as the state religion would lead to his downfall and the imposition of military rule, while Cambodia gradually became embroiled in a wider regional conflict that led to Sihanouk's ousting in 1970, a protracted civil war, and the eventual victory of the Khmer Rouge five years later. But this, of course, has not led to the demise of various projects to infuse the political process with Buddhist values.

From its inception Buddhism has placed great emphasis on contentment, moderation, and the belief that unending consumption, driven by greed, hatred, or delusion, compounds our suffering. This is the essence of the Buddhist critique of consumerism as found in the writings of E. F. Schumacher, Sulak Sivaraksa, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, and Helena Norberg-Hodge, to name but a few. Such ideas clearly impacted on the king of Bhutan when, in June 1998, he initiated a remarkable series of political and economic reforms. The most prominent of these was the promotion of a concept of gross national happiness (GNH), based on the four principles of preservation and promotion of culture, environmental protection, good governance, and socio-economic development, as opposed to the more usual measure of gross national product (GNP; Herschock 2004: 71). We might regard this policy as an updating of the previously mentioned notion that a Buddhist-oriented third way represents a middle path between neo-liberal free market capitalism and the communist command economy.

But the move towards a more explicit politics in Buddhist Asia came quite late in the tradition's history. If we take Burma as an example, we do know that monks forced a successful boycott of the polls during the 1922 General Election and were influential opinion formers in the follow-up vote of 1932. But another four years were to pass before several high-ranking monks founded the country's first formal Buddhist political organisation, the Ngabwinsaing Party, to fight Burma's 1936 elections (Mendelson 1975: 210).

Somewhat later in Ladakh, the only Buddhist majority region of India, a prominent Geluk monk, Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, represented Leh for the dominant Kashmir National Conference party in the Jammu and Kashmir legislature in the period immediately after Independence. One of the major issues that he addressed was the rupture in Ladakhi Buddhists' contact with Tibet, and consequent sense of beleaguerment, following the creation of the People's Republic of China. In due course the Indian government offered Scheduled Class Status to Ladakhis and, although Bakula opposed the move at the time, by the 1960s he was fervently pleading for the recognition of the Buddhists of Ladakh as 'backward classes.'

But indisputably the most developed form of explicit political activity can currently be found in Sri Lanka. It seems that a certain Ven. Samitha was the first Buddhist monk to become an MP in Sri Lanka. He stood for a Trotskyite grouping and lost his seat in April 2004. But the formation of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), a political party of ordained monks 280 of whom ran in the April 2004 parliamentary elections, is more significant (Deegalle 2004: 88–91). The JHU, which appears to have benefitted from the support of older female lay devotees and university lecturers, among others, won nine seats in parliament and aims to inform Sri Lankan political life with Buddhist ethical principles, such as the ten royal virtues (*rājadhamma*).

The JHU has its roots in the political monk movement of the 1940s based around Walpola Rahula and his colleagues, but more proximate influences relate to the country's ongoing civil war, fear of Christianization, and 'controversy' over the untimely death of a prominent monk, Ven. Gangodawila Soma, a prominent opponent of foreign, 'missionary' NGOs, in December 2003. The latter individual had a fatal heart attack while attending an interfaith conference in Russia, and as part of its electoral strategy the JHU's leader, Ven. Ellāwalla Medhānandahe, used an oration at Ven. Soma's funeral to claim that the 'Christian fundamentalist connection to Soma Thero's untimely death in St Petersburg ... was not an accident.'[12]

The top policy objective of the JHU has been to curb 'unethical conversions'. Even before it had any electoral success two members, Ven. Dr. Omalpe Sobhita Thera and Ven. Rajawatte Vappe Thera, had started a fast-unto-death to raise the issue. However, under pressure from JHU MPs, the Minister of Buddha Sasana announced in June 2005 that the government was planning to introduce legislation to protect Buddhism that, at the same time, was '... in no way intended to harm or undermine other religions.'[13]

However, the Bill was shot down by the Supreme Court on the grounds that it violated the country's constitutional right to freedom of religion. The JHU then tried to amend the Constitution to make Buddhism the state religion and thus make conversion from Buddhism impossible.[14] This was also ruled unconstitutional. Clearly the injection of Buddhism into the political process, although often well meant, can be fraught with dangerous consequences.

Discussion questions

- How far is political activity compatible with the Buddha's 'essential' message?
- Identify important historical examples of 'Buddhist kingship.' What is the role of the 'Buddhist king'?
- What, if anything, does Buddhism have to teach us about the conduct of politics in the modern world?
- Does the notion of a politically engaged Buddhist monk make sense in the contemporary world?
- Why were the *Buddha jayanti* celebrations significant in the emergence of a modern 'Buddhist politics' in Asia?

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Notes

1 D. ii. 72f . Also see, A. iv.15f. The seven conditions are as follows: The Vajjians held frequent public meetings that they all attended; met together to make their decisions and carried out

their undertakings in concord; upheld tradition and honored their pledges; respected and supported their elders; no women or girls were allowed to be taken by force or abduction; maintained and paid due respect to their places of worship; supported and fully protected holy men.

2 Quoted in Ling (1979: 135).
3 Jerryson and Juergensmeyer (2010) is a recent exception to this rule.
4 Cited by Tikhonov (2006: 216).
5 *Rangoon Gazette Weekly Budget*, July 11 and September 19, 1921.
6 Baabar, B. (1999: 369) *Twentieth Century Mongolia*, trans. D. Suhjargalmaa *et al.* Cambridge: White Horse Press.
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10 Socially Engaged Buddhism

Sallie B. King

Introduction

Socially Engaged Buddhism, also called Engaged Buddhism, is a major movement of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Buddhism found throughout the Buddhist world, East and West. It is characterized by Buddhists engaging in a nonviolent way on a popular, and often mass, level with the social, political, economic, and/or environmental issues facing them in their countries. It is not defined by sectarian identity – Socially Engaged Buddhists may belong to any sect, whether Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna or nonsectarian. Nor is it defined by geography – Socially Engaged Buddhism is found wherever there are Buddhists, with the exception of those countries where it is suppressed by an authoritarian government.

Socially Engaged Buddhism did not begin with the vision of a single founder but sprang up in the twentieth century in one Buddhist country after another, usually in response to a grave crisis facing the country, such as war, invasion, deep poverty, ecological crisis, or human rights abuse. The issues it engages with, consequently, are diverse. What makes Socially Engaged Buddhism into a single movement is not only the fact that all Socially Engaged Buddhists engage with practical problems in the world, nor only the additional fact that these outbreaks of Buddhist activism arose during the same era, but also and especially the similarity of the manner in which Buddhists have responded to the challenges facing them, the shared principles that arise again and again, from country to country, throughout this wave of activism. That this should be so is not surprising: Socially Engaged Buddhism is at base a modern *application* of traditional Buddhist values and principles to contemporary social problems. Thus, what ties global Buddhism together also ties together Socially Engaged Buddhism.

War, Violence and Nonviolence

The twentieth century saw man-made disasters of horrifying magnitude afflicting Buddhist Asia: nuclear bombs dropped on Japan, genocide in Cambodia, the prolonged war in Southeast Asia, the invasion and occupation of Tibet. All of these have inspired Socially Engaged Buddhist responses. These responses are, in each case, uncompromised applications of the ideals of the Buddhist tradition: nonviolence, compassion, and loving-kindness, and the search for an outcome that benefits all. Here there is space only to examine the cases of Tibet and Vietnam.

Tibet

Tibet suffered Chinese invasion in 1949, ultimately leading to the loss of Tibetan sovereignty through its annexation into the People's Republic of China (PRC). Perhaps

one million Tibetans, about one-sixth of the population, died as a result of the Chinese invasion and occupation, either directly through violence or indirectly as a result of famine caused by imposed Chinese agricultural policies. Others suffered, and continue to suffer, imprisonment and torture for political reasons. In addition, the Chinese have steadily and intentionally eroded traditional Tibetan culture, religion, and way of life with their transfer population policy that entails moving very large numbers of Han Chinese into the Tibetan area, thereby diluting the Tibetan presence in their own country.

Monks and nuns have been at the forefront of the resistance to the Chinese occupation. In addition to restricting many monastics' activities, the Chinese government has imprisoned many monastics as a result of their speaking out on behalf of Tibet. At present, 79% of Tibetan political prisoners are monks or nuns.

The Indian government has allowed the Tibetans to establish a government in exile in Dharamsala. There the Tibetan leadership looks after the welfare of the Tibetan refugees and leads the effort to gain autonomy for Tibet. The Tibetan leadership has pursued the goal of autonomy with an approach stressing strict nonviolence and compassion.

The Dalai Lama is famous throughout the world as perhaps the greatest living exemplar of compassion. His Holiness – whom the faithful believe is the incarnation of Avalokiteshvara (Tib.: Chenrezig), the *bodhisattva* of compassion – has written and spoken extensively about compassion, making the case that it is a fundamental part of human being: The human race would not exist but for the generous love of mothers and the innate capacity for empathy found in humankind (Dalai Lama 1999). His Holiness has reported that it is part of his daily spiritual practice to cultivate *metta*, or loving-kindness, for the Chinese leadership. He hopes thereby to ensure that in all his dealings with them he will maintain a motivation of loving-kindness. In the Tibetan struggle with the Chinese, the Tibetans frequently express their compassion for the Chinese who, they believe, are earning painful karmic retribution in the future for the suffering they are causing the Tibetans now. This thinking in terms of *karma* is one of the motivations for the Tibetans' seeking a win-win solution to the Tibet–China conflict. In the Tibetan view it is in the interest of both sides to bring this conflict to a satisfactory resolution – in order to end present and future Tibetan suffering as well as future Chinese suffering brought about by *karma*. Thinking in terms of *karma* also reinforces the Tibetans' proclivity for maintaining a strictly nonviolent stance: By avoiding a violent response to the Chinese, they avoid sowing negative karmic seeds, which would cause them pain in the future.

Tibetan overtures to the Chinese have fallen on deaf ears and there has been no progress in the Tibetan situation at the time of writing. Some among the Tibetan youth have grown impatient with the Tibetan leadership's policies and are advocating for a different approach, perhaps including the use of violence. The Dalai Lama, however, has made it clear that he will never be party to a violent approach. The

former Kalon Tripa (Prime Minister of the Tibetan government in exile), Samdhong Rinpoche, points out that if the Tibetans had used violence they would simply have been crushed, but by adhering to nonviolence, they have kept the Tibetan issue alive and Tibet remains an unresolved problem that the Chinese must deal with. Moreover, he says, not a single PRC or Tibetan life has been lost as a result of the nonviolence, a great and sacred achievement in itself (Rinpoche 2006: 158–9).

Vietnam

During the war in Vietnam, South Vietnamese Buddhist activists in the ‘Struggle Movement’ sought to end the war by using strictly nonviolent means, while siding with neither North Vietnam and the Communists nor with South Vietnam and the Americans. They thus called themselves the ‘Third Way,’ the way that was on the side of neither North nor South, but on the side of the people and on the side of life. Buddhist monastics at that time united for the purpose of speaking with a single voice and formed the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. While its leadership was monastic, the laity enthusiastically participated in the actions of this organization. This was a mass movement that could mobilize hundreds of thousands for an event.

The Buddhist anti-war movement in Vietnam undertook a variety of actions to try to stop the war, to bring down governments that supported the war, and to protect and heal the Vietnamese people. These actions included: composing and popularizing anti-war songs and poems to inspire and educate people; practicing noncooperation with the government – strikes, student boycotts, draft resistance, mass resignations, etc.; aiding and protecting military deserters and draft resisters; staging massive anti-government and/or anti-war rallies and demonstrations; evacuating villages caught in the crossfire of battle; establishing cease-fire lines outside of villages; reconstructing villages that had been destroyed by war; arranging care for war orphans; placing family altars in the street to try to block the movement of tanks; government personnel and forces (civil servants, police, and army) refusing to obey government orders hostile to the Struggle Movement; and self-immolation.

Of all these actions, the self-immolations were the only actions of the Socially Engaged Buddhists that most people in the United States ever heard of, though they were little understood there. Vietnamese monks, nuns and laypeople engaged in self-immolation, burning themselves to death as an act of self-sacrifice to hasten the end of the war. While outsiders might regard these actions as violent, the Vietnamese overwhelmingly regarded them as the self-sacrificing actions of *bodhisattvas*, undertaken in order to protect the people. As Thích Nhât Hanh has explained it, self-immolation is an effort to communicate to others the suffering that is inherent in war. These particular self-immolations were an effort to reach those who were promoting



Figure 10.1 Self-immolation by a Buddhist monk in the central market square of Saigon (1963)

the war and touch them so deeply that they would no longer want to continue the war effort, but would instead voluntarily bring the war to an end.

The Vietnamese monk Thích Nhât Hanh is one of the principal founders of the entire Socially Engaged Buddhism movement; during the war years, he was one of the principal theoreticians of the Struggle Movement. Some of his most important contributions to Engaged Buddhist thinking resulted from his experiences during the war. For example, one of his signature ideas is 'being peace,' the idea that in order to make peace, one must first 'be peace' (Nhât Hanh 1987). In explaining this idea, he has commented that while in the United States he observed American 'peace' demonstrations that were angry in character, with a simmering latent violence, he saw pro-war and anti-war groups as themselves engaged in a war. To him, this was no way to end war – by opening up yet another front in the war. He advocated instead finding one's own inner peace and from that base finding a way to transform the situation. Again, he taught his young disciples during the war years that they could maintain a cool head and avoid being overwhelmed by fear in a crisis situation, through the traditional Buddhist practice of cultivating mindfulness. In a crisis, he pointed out, the most important thing is not to panic; mindfulness is a tool that can be



Figure 10.2 Thích Nhât Hanh

used for this purpose. In ways like this, he brought traditional Buddhist practices and spirituality directly into the efforts to end war and respond to immediate, practical crises.

Both the Dalai Lama and Thích Nhât Hanh show us that the activism of Socially Engaged Buddhism by no means requires turning one's back on traditional Buddhism, its spirituality, values, and practices. On the contrary, in many respects the Buddhism they encourage continues traditional Buddhist spirituality, values, and practices and indeed *extends* those traditional elements into new areas of application. They make it clear that this is a way of Buddhist spiritual practice – a way of developing compassion and selflessness that may be even more challenging than traditional ways, inasmuch as one will be tested by an enemy in challenging situations and may have to make choices literally under fire. It is a path that has produced many heroes, most of whose stories have never been told.

Poverty

Sarvodaya Shramadana

The Sarvodaya Shramadana movement of Sri Lanka is one of the most creative and successful in producing concrete results of all the Socially Engaged Buddhist movements. Sarvodaya is a major development organization that is active in over 15,000 Sri Lankan villages and is the largest non-government agency in that country. In addition to development work, Sarvodaya was deeply involved in relief work after the devastating tsunami that hit Sri Lanka in 2004, in peacemaking efforts during Sri Lanka's long civil war, and in relief work in the Tamil camps after the end of the war.

One might not question why Buddhists would be involved in peacemaking and relief work, since such work can be seen as an obvious expression of compassion, but still wonder what Buddhists are doing in development work. In poverty as deep as Sri Lanka's, though, this is compassion work as well. Moreover, the Buddha himself was no friend of poverty, as A. T. Ariyaratne and others point out: On one occasion the Buddha refused to speak until a hungry man was fed; the Buddha himself was unable to attain enlightenment until he gave up fasting and ate!

Ariyaratne has developed the basics of 'Buddhist Economics' as an alternative to both capitalist and Marxist economics. Its principles include the belief that 'small is beautiful' – endless economic growth is neither sustainable nor desirable; and the goal is to meet 'needs, not greed' – that is, the basic human needs must be met, but this does not mean that the endless craving for more and better that leads only to more *duḥkha* is to be catered to; the best path for society is a Middle Path between poverty and wealth – no one should be cold and hungry, but no one should live in wasteful and luxurious splendor, either.

Sarvodaya's signature program for meeting its goals is the *shramadana*, or work-camp (the word *shramadana* means 'giving labor,' which suggests the Buddhist implications of the meritorious nature of giving). Everyone in a village is invited to a *shramadana* – men, women and children and all ethnic and religious groups – and everyone decides together what the village's priority is for a need to be met – a road, well, preschool building, or whatever the community needs. On the appointed day, everyone shows up to pitch in together to build what was agreed upon, and at the end everyone celebrates their accomplishment with a shared meal and party. This is a self-help program; villagers make the decisions and do the labor themselves. It is empowering to the village as a whole and to each individual, each of whom made a contribution, and none of whom waited for the government. Sarvodaya's most famous slogan is: 'we build the road and the road builds us.' At the end of the *shramadana* the village will have a road (or a well, etc.), so there is tangible accomplishment. But it is at least as significant that the road has built them – each individual and the group as a whole may have a new feeling about what they are capable of, and new relationships have been built among the villagers, across lines that may ordinarily separate them, such as gender or religion. In this way, Ariyaratne often says that his ultimate goal is the 'dual awakening' of the individual and the village, an awakening not only to economic and social possibilities, but to the spiritual possibilities suggested by practices that teach one to think of the good of the village as a whole (*metta* or loving-kindness), develop selflessness by contributing one's labor in a cooperative way (*anatta* or no self), celebrate the joys of others (sympathetic joy), and handle with grace the ups and downs of any practical project (equanimity).

Roshi Bernie Glassman

American Zen master Roshi Bernie Glassman, like Ariyaratne, has made responding to deep poverty a major part of his life's work. In Glassman's case, it was the poverty of the homeless and chronically unemployed in Yonkers, New York that concerned him. Drawing upon his Zen background and years of experience, Glassman has named three principles that guide his work: not-knowing, thereby giving up fixed ideas about ourselves and the universe; bearing witness to the joy and suffering of the world; and loving action for ourselves and the world. He has also studied Ariyaratne's work.

Glassman agreed with Ariyaratne that the poor needed self-help, not handouts. He started a bakery, the Greyston Bakery, now a well-known $6 million business that bakes gourmet desserts, in order to create jobs for those regarded as unemployable. Greyston's website states, 'We don't hire people to make brownies; we make brownies in order to hire people' – specifically those people considered 'hard to employ.' Soon it became clear that jobs were not enough; one problem solved raised another. In order to work well, the homeless needed training not only in job skills, but in life

skills and communication skills as well. They needed alcohol and drug counseling. They needed decent homes. Glassman recognized the interdependence of these needs and ultimately created the Greyston Mandala, a network of for-profit businesses and not-for-profit agencies, all serving the poor. The Mandala is made up of the Greyston Bakery; the Greyston Family Inn, affordable and decent housing managed by the formerly homeless; Issan House, a housing facility for people with HIV/AIDS; and the Maitri Center, a day health facility for people with HIV/AIDS. There are related programs that provide training, counseling, child care, after-school programs, and community gardens.

Glassman conceives the spiritual aspect of this work in terms of Right Livelihood. In his thinking, Right Livelihood earns one enough to sustain oneself and one's dependants and also to be able to save some money. Beyond that, Right Livelihood must contribute to personal and spiritual growth. This is nurtured in the bakery by working in teams where the entire team is rewarded for its work as a group, facilitating cooperation, caring about others' success and a less selfish attitude. Right Livelihood also incorporates ongoing learning and an element of social action or benefit to others (Glassman and Fields 1996).

Human Rights and Well-Being

Burma

The struggle for human rights in Burma, also known as Myanmar, is led politically by Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy and led in the streets by monks, nuns, and students. Burma has been ruled since the 1960s by an autocratic military regime. This government has been brutal towards its own people, engaging regularly in major human rights violations such as summary executions, extensive forced labor and portage, military use of rape, destructions of the villages of ethnic minorities, and the forcible recruitment of child soldiers. Burma has over 500,000 internally displaced citizens and untold numbers of paid informants spying on the people for the government. In 1988 and again in 2007 (in what is called the 'Saffron Revolution' after the color of the monks' robes) the streets of Rangoon and other Burmese cities were filled with marching monks and nuns, calling for democracy and human rights.

Why are monks and nuns in the streets of Burma demonstrating for human rights? Buddhists defend human rights as compatible with Buddhism in the following ways (King 2005):

(1) Human rights presume the inherent dignity of the human being. In Buddhism, the human birth is considered the precious birth, as a human being is the only kind of being within samsara that can achieve enlightenment.

(2) Human rights presume human equality. The Buddha rejected the caste system. He invited all classes and castes and both genders to practice Buddhism without restriction, and confirmed people of all backgrounds as having achieved enlightenment.
(3) The Five Lay Precepts, though they are oriented towards responsibilities, imply corresponding rights; e.g. the first precept, not to kill, implies a right to life.
(4) A free and open society with personal security and the freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, assembly, etc. is essential to the pursuit of spiritual development.

Why was it monks (and nuns) who led the street demonstrations calling for an end to the military regime and the respect of human rights? There are many reasons, the most fundamental being compassion for the suffering of the people and the desire to do something to protect them. Secondly, the monastics are very highly regarded and can be seen as the conscience of the nation. If they publicly voice that the government is immoral, many will be persuaded. This makes their voice very powerful, and very threatening to dictatorial regimes. In Burma in 2007 the monks marched in the streets, turning their begging bowls upside down as a gesture indicating that they would refuse donations from the military. This was a powerful condemnation. Thirdly, the monastics are regarded as sacrosanct by many Burmese. Consequently, though their presence in the streets was a threat to the regime, it was difficult for the regime to be seen attacking them, as this violation might incite the laypeople to greater levels of rebellion. In the end, however, the regime did crack down severely on the monastics and the protests came to an end, for the time being.

Dalit Buddhists

Dalit Buddhists are persons converted from the former ‘untouchable’ class in India. While untouchability has been made illegal in India, the untouchable category having been replaced with the category of ‘scheduled castes,’ the taint of supposed pollution and spiritual and social lowliness attached to the group remains in the minds of many higher-class Indians. ‘Dalit’ means ‘oppressed’ and is the term that all the former untouchables, Buddhist or otherwise, use for themselves. Thus dalit Buddhists see themselves as people oppressed by the Indian social system; they see Buddhism as a path of not only spiritual, but also social, liberation.

In 1935 the untouchable leader B. R. Ambedkar – Ph.D., lawyer and primary author of the Indian Constitution – declared that because Hinduism would not abandon the caste system that degraded and oppressed millions of human beings, he would no longer be a Hindu. When he publicly converted to Buddhism (chosen partly because the Buddha rejected the caste system) in 1956, about a half million untouchables

converted with him. To this day, the act of conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism is a deeply significant act to the dalit Buddhists, one which represents their rejection of the degradation visited upon them by the Hindu caste system and their embracing of the dignity and hope for a better life that they believe Buddhism offers them. There are approximately 8,000,000 Buddhists in India today, the vast majority of them ex-untouchables. Mass conversions to Buddhism (as well as to Christianity and Islam) continue from the ranks of the ex-untouchable dalits.

The lives of some dalits have greatly improved over the past few decades as a consequence of government programs providing them with the opportunity to be educated and find employment. Other dalits' lives have changed very little, or not at all. These dalits have tremendous needs in all areas – housing, health and sanitation, food and clean water, education, employment. One Buddhist group has stepped forward in a major way to help the dalit Buddhists, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO). They established a branch of their order in India called Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG) for the dalit Buddhists and have been working for decades both to help provide the many social and economic services and resources needed by the dalits (with services now managed by the dalits themselves) and to teach these new Buddhists the Dharma. For while the dalits' conversions to Buddhism are largely socially motivated, the social deprivation they have suffered has often resulted in psychological/spiritual conditions such as despair, self-loathing, anxiety, and depression. These are conditions that specifically Buddhist teachings and practices are called upon to help heal, using the Buddha's teachings on universal human enlightenability to promote self-esteem, for example, and mindfulness practice to become aware of, and consequently become able to be free of, repetitive, negative thought patterns.

Tzu Chi

Tzu Chi (also known as Ciji Gongdehui, or 'Buddhist Compassionate Relief Association') stands out among Socially Engaged Buddhist groups for having successfully inspired millions of lay Buddhists to engage in practical service work in a way that has become stably institutionalized. It was founded in Taiwan in 1966 by the nun, Ven. Master Cheng Yen. Today it is a huge charitable organization with over 4,000,000 members. It is based in Taiwan and has branches in 28 countries, established by expatriate Taiwanese and Chinese. It has made particularly impressive contributions in establishing free health care in Taiwan, the world's third-largest bone marrow data bank, and effective disaster response teams that are admitted even to the People's Republic of China and North Korea, countries that do not normally admit foreign assistance.

The nun Cheng Yen founded Tzu Chi after visiting a Taiwanese hospital and seeing a pool of blood on the floor. She was told that the blood was from an aborigine

woman who was suffering a miscarriage but was nonetheless denied admission to the hospital as she could not pay the entrance fee. Her determination to provide free medical care ultimately resulted in the construction of a large, fully modern hospital, built entirely with donated funds and offering free medical care. Cheng Yen was able to accomplish this because she tapped into an important resource. Taiwan is a stable and relatively wealthy country and there are many people, particularly housewives, who were living comfortable lives but nevertheless were unhappy – they felt lonely or empty, or that their lives were meaningless. Many of them jumped at the chance to donate their time and work. Cheng Yen has reflected on this by stressing the Mahāyāna Buddhist idea of giving with no giver and no one to whom something is given. As Cheng Yen puts it, 'The poor and wretched receive help, the rich and fortunate activate their love, and thus both can be grateful to each other' (Chappell 2000: 49). Those who donate their time and labor with Tzu Chi are receiving joy and a meaningful life – valuable things that they could not receive without the needy giving them the opportunity. So each gives to the other; neither is just 'giver' or 'recipient.'

Environment

Buddhism views life as a web of interdependence; it has no dichotomy between the sacred and the profane (which can debase the latter by exalting the former). Thus, Buddhist philosophy is very congenial to modern ecological and environmental concerns. In addition, Buddhism regards animals as sentient beings, and over time Buddhist monasteries and temple grounds have often developed into places where animal and plant life is protected. Socially Engaged Buddhism's task has been to draw upon this world view and these traditions and to develop creative responses to the environmental dilemmas facing the modern world.

Some new monasteries intentionally continue the tradition of Buddhist monasteries as wildlife sanctuaries. For example, Zen Mountain Monastery in New York state made its first act upon incorporation the formal protection of 80 percent of its 250-acre property as 'forever wild.' It offers regular retreats in the wilderness, giving people the opportunity for a spiritual experience within the natural world. Its Green Dragon Society practices 'advocacy for the insentient' on Zen Mountain Monastery lands.

In Thailand, 'ecology monks' have sprung up, scattered throughout the country. One of their primary concerns is the country's rapid deforestation. Their response to the problem varies. Many educate the rural population about sustainable agriculture and the consequences for erosion and flooding of cutting trees. They help them to find ways to support themselves that do not require cutting trees. They may invite laypeople to give tree seedlings, instead of robes and cash, to the

temple to earn merit – often trees that can produce an income for the villagers, such as fruit trees, will be planted. If trees are threatened by commercial foresters, rather than villagers, they may ceremoniously 'ordain' one of the older trees as a 'monk,' making the tree into a sacred object that should not be harmed and sanctifying the entire forest around it. Ecology monks who challenge Thailand's lucrative logging companies sometimes face threats or harm. Some monks have been forced to disrobe due to their activities, and one monk was killed after protesting illegal logging.

Justification

Socially Engaged Buddhism has articulated a number of ways in which it justifies itself to more traditional Buddhists:

(1) Some Buddhists, such as Thích Nhât Hanh, argue that Buddhism has always been socially engaged. All of Buddhism is engaged, he says, because all of it addresses, and attempts to overcome, human suffering.

(2) Other Buddhists, such as A. T. Ariyaratne, argue from the historical perspective. Ariyaratne points out that before Western colonialism came to Sri Lanka, the Buddhist monastics there were engaged with society in many ways – teaching, offering medical care, advising rulers. It was the colonial government, partly at the urging of the Christian missionaries who came with them, who shut down Buddhism's more secular functions.

Some may respond to these arguments with the counter-argument that Buddhism is about escaping samsara, not trying to fix it, and that Buddhism shows that it is inherently impossible to fix samsara, which is intrinsically *duḥkha*.

(3) To this, some Socially Engaged Buddhists reply that the problem with samsara should not be understood as a problem with the world; the problem is with us, with our greed, hatred and delusion, with our mental habits and our clinging to I, me and mine. If we were to overcome our own shortcomings, there would be no more *duḥkha*.

(4) A final argument stresses that Socially Engaged Buddhism is by no means a form of social activism devoid of spirituality. Very much on the contrary, they say, one's engagement with the problems of society is part and parcel of one's spiritual practice, an application and testing of that practice in demanding situations. If one is supposed to be developing selflessness, loving-kindness, compassion and equanimity, what better resource than the world of need and suffering?

Shared Principles

Certain ideas and principles are used again and again by the Socially Engaged Buddhists. Among them are the following.

(1) Causation:
Socially Engaged Buddhist thinking is guided by the principle of cause and effect. If there is a problem that concerns one, rather than directly attacking the problem, it may be better to uncover the cause of the problem and try to either remove or change it. ‘When the fuel is removed, the fire goes out.’ Thus, in its analysis of the civil war in Sri Lanka, Sarvodaya identified the root causes of the war as poverty and ethnic hatred and worked on those.

(2) The Four Noble Truths:
These can be used as a template for analysis: the First Noble Truth, *duḥkha*, or suffering, is the problem that all of Buddhism is designed to cure. Once one has identified a problem, one may try to identify its cause (Second Noble Truth) and how to remove or change that cause (Fourth Noble Truth). A complete analysis may contain a vision of the hoped-for outcome of one’s efforts (Third Noble Truth). In its development work in impoverished villages, Sarvodaya uses the Four Noble Truths as a template: first truth (problem) – an impoverished and dysfunctional village; second truth (cause) – ignorance, disunity, ill-will; third truth (vision/hope) – a village with constructive activity, cooperation, equality, pleasant speech; fourth truth (path) – economic, organizational, educational, cultural, and spiritual development (Macy 1983: 34).

(3) Interdependence:
Real-world problems are complex; one needs to work on all the interlocking parts of the puzzle, as Bernie Glassman has done with the Greyston Mandala. Moreover, the modern world is highly characterized by interdependence. The Dalai Lama stresses, for example, that because of globalization and the flow of problems such as economic disturbances, disease, refugees, pollution, and violence from one country to another, one people’s problem can quickly become everyone’s problem; consequently, he urges that we cultivate a sense of ‘universal responsibility.’

(4) Engaged spirituality:
Engagement, of course, is a defining characteristic of Socially Engaged Buddhism; this engagement, though, is a vital part of one’s Buddhist practice and spirituality. Spirituality and social activism are seen as mutually constructive and, ideally, balanced. The Socially Engaged Buddhists come back again and again to the importance of developing one’s own inner peace in order to work for peace in the world, the need to ‘be peace’ in order to make peace. They all encourage one or another form of Buddhist practice from those who are a part of their movement. Compassion and loving-kindness are constantly cited as the motivations of their actions.

(5) Nonviolence:
Nonviolence is another defining characteristic of Socially Engaged Buddhism. There are Buddhists in the modern world who are engaged with problems in society, but they are not Socially Engaged Buddhists because they engage those problems in an aggressive and/or violent way. One example is the right-wing nationalist Buddhists of Sri Lanka, who not only participated in and justified a violent civil war against the Tamil minority, but questioned the right of the Tamils to live in Sri Lanka and relegated them to second-class citizenship in that country. This is not Socially Engaged Buddhism both because of its violence and because of its strident adversariality.

(6) Non-adversariality:
While they are engaged in a variety of struggles, Socially Engaged Buddhists typically eschew the posture of adversariality. They frequently 'hate the deed [of their adversary], but not the doer [the adversary him/herself],' as Gandhi advised. They frequently turn to causation and seek to understand the causes behind their adversary's behavior, a method that helps them to feel less anger towards the adversary. Thus, during the war in Vietnam, Thích Nhât Hanh pointed out that the people of the countries at war were in the grip of various delusions, including Cold-War and other ideologies, and had been taught to hate each other. Our enemy, he said, is ignorance and hatred, not our brothers. With a non-adversarial attitude, Socially Engaged Buddhists typically seek a win-win outcome that will satisfy the true needs of each side, rather than a one-sided win. They frequently voice the intention that their adversaries not suffer.

Controversial Issues

As we have seen, Socially Engaged Buddhism is found throughout the Buddhist world and millions upon millions of Buddhists have been actively involved with it. Nonetheless, there are certain controversial issues that surround Socially Engaged Buddhism, an inevitability in a reformist and modernizing movement.

Westernization

Socially Engaged Buddhism has been subject to the charge of being 'Westernized' Buddhism, the implication being that this makes it suspect or invalid. This is a multi-faceted issue. It must be acknowledged that there has been considerable Western influence on many of the Socially Engaged Buddhist leaders, a number of whom studied or have spent considerable time in the West. The most significant specific Western influences on Socially Engaged Buddhism have been the way of thinking

found in Western social sciences (economics, sociology, and political science) and the example of charitable work found in Christianity.

On the other hand, Western thinking and approaches have by no means gone unchallenged by the Socially Engaged Buddhists. They are not passive recipients of Western thinking, but actively engage it, selecting what they find useful (such as the idea of human rights), passing by what they don't want (such as the idea of political justice, an idea that one scarcely sees mentioned), and challenging what they find problematic (such as the anger in Western peace demonstrations or the excessive individualism of Western society). Always this interaction is made from a Buddhist perspective and on the basis of Buddhist values. It should in addition be noted that the most prominent Socially Engaged Buddhists – especially the Dalai Lama and Thích Nhât Hanh – are also influencing Western society.

Karma

There is hardly a more crucial element in Buddhist thought than *karma*. Nevertheless, *karma* has emerged as a significant point of difficulty for some Socially Engaged Buddhists. The dalit leader B. R. Ambedkar, for example, flatly rejected the traditional teaching that the conditions of one's birth – including the family into which one is born (with its caste and class status) – are the karmic results of seeds planted in a previous lifetime. For Ambedkar, this teaching simply blamed the victim of a stifling and oppressive social system (the caste system), adding to the injury caused by the system the crippling insult of telling its victims that their suffering was their own fault. While he embraced Buddhism enthusiastically, he altogether omitted this part of Buddhism from the book that he wrote to instruct the dalits in Buddhist thought.

A second way in which *karma* is a problem for some Socially Engaged Buddhists can be seen in the Burmese case. Aung San Suu Kyi states that one of the greatest obstacles facing the Burmese struggle is the traditional interpretation of *karma* as fate. Many Burmese believe that their suffering under the military regime that rules Burma is due to their *karma*, their past actions, and that there is no way to change the situation until that *karma* plays out. Consequently, they keep a low profile and wait for the situation to change. Aung San Suu Kyi and other Socially Engaged Buddhists argue that this understanding is contrary to the teaching of the Buddha, who emphasized repeatedly that any teaching that engenders passivity and fatalism is a pernicious teaching that should definitely be avoided. Socially Engaged Buddhists emphasize that *karma* and causality only take us to the present moment. In the present moment, we have choice. Using this choice, we can introduce new causes and conditions that may shape the future in a new way. The important thing is to make wise choices.

Gender

Karma is a challenge for Socially Engaged Buddhism that was inherited from tradition. In contrast, discontent with traditional views and practices with respect to gender is an issue with which Socially Engaged Buddhism challenges tradition. Certainly Western feminist Buddhists have been among those voicing complaints, but they are by no means alone.

An important issue raised by Asian Buddhist activists is the status of nuns within the Buddhist *saṅgha*. Equal education, training and opportunities for nuns and monks is a major concern raised by Buddhist nuns. Another prominent issue in this context is the restoration of the *bhikkhunī* order in Theravāda Buddhism, which died out centuries ago. Despite resistance from conservative elements of the Theravāda *saṅgha*, the restoration of the Theravāda *bhikkhunī* order is now under way. In 1988, in a ceremony using Theravāda monks and Mahāyāna nuns, five Sri Lankan quasi-nuns (*dasa sil mātāvo*) received *bhikkhunī* ordination in Los Angeles in a temple belonging to the activist Fo Kuang Shan of Taiwan. This began a process that has now produced over 500 Theravāda *bhikkhunī* in Sri Lanka. In 2003 the Ven. Dhammananda became the first ever ordained Theravāda *bhikkhunī* in Thailand. She is now training a first generation of Thai *bhikkhunī*.

Summary

- Socially Engaged Buddhism is found throughout the Buddhist world, East and West. It did not have a single founder but arose in individual movements from country to country, in response to the critical problems in each country.
- Socially Engaged Buddhism engages social, economic, political, and environmental issues.
- Socially Engaged Buddhism has made especially important contributions in developing the practice of nonviolence in some of the most challenging circumstances: war, occupation, dictatorship.
- Important principles of Socially Engaged Buddhist work include: causation; the Four Noble Truths; interdependence; engaged spirituality; nonviolence; and non-adversariality.
- Socially Engaged Buddhism is controversial for some by virtue of its activism and the Western influence upon it.
- Socially Engaged Buddhism itself challenges traditional Buddhism with respect to traditional interpretations of *karma* and the status of women in the Buddhist world.

Discussion questions

- Does Buddhist spirituality allow for engagement with the world of samsara? Does it perhaps require it?
- Is Socially Engaged Buddhism's strict nonviolence a hindrance or an asset to their achieving such goals as autonomy for Tibet or the overcoming of dictatorship in Burma?
- Does *karma* blame the victim? Does it promote passivity? Do changes in the understanding of *karma* need to be made in order for Buddhist approaches to be useful in bringing about social change?
- Does Buddhism teach that the problems of samsara and *duḥkha* are in the world or in us?
- What do Buddhist ways of engaging social and political problems have to teach us in the West?

Further reading

Chappell, D. W. (2000) (ed.) *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*, Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.

An anthology of voices of Socially Engaged Buddhist leaders, including: the Dalai Lama, Thích Nhât Hanh, A. T. Ariyaratne, and many more.

Dalai Lama, His Holiness the (1999) *Ethics for the New Millennium*, New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

The moral principles underlying the Dalai Lama's thought and action, presented in a universal (not specifically Buddhist) fashion, emphasizing compassion, nonviolence and His Holiness's argument for the fundamental goodness of humanity.

Glassman, B. and Fields, R. (1996) *Instructions to the Cook: A Zen Master's Lessons in Living a Life that Matters*, New York, NY: Bell Tower.

An account of Glassman's development of the Greyston Mandala, on the basis of Zen principles, as a response to entrenched poverty.

Kaza, S. and Kraft, K. (2000) (eds) *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, Boston and London: Shambhala Publications.

A collection of important documents for Buddhist environmentalism, from traditional sutra excerpts, poems and essays to contemporary explorations of environmental thought and action.

King, S. B. (2005) *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

A study of the ethical principles underlying Socially Engaged Buddhism. Chapters focus on: the ethical principles of Socially Engaged Buddhism, the relationship between individual and society, human rights, nonviolence, and justice/reconciliation.

— (2009) *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

An introduction to Socially Engaged Buddhism, both Asian and Western, organized by topic: philosophy and ethics, spirituality, war and peace, economics, ecology, human rights and criminal justice, and challenging tradition.

Macy, J. (1983) *Dharma and Development: Religion as Resource in the Sarvodaya Self-Help Movement*, West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.

An introduction to and insightful study of the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement in its earlier decades.

Nhât Hanh, T. (1987) *Being Peace*, Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

Thích Nhât Hanh's most famous work, declaring the major themes of Socially Engaged Buddhism, including the idea that in order to make peace, one must ‘be peace.’

Queen, C. S. (2000) (ed.) *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.

A study of Western Socially Engaged Buddhism, mostly in the USA, with some attention to Europe, Africa and Australia. Includes chapters on Bernie Glassman, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Buddhist environmentalism, Buddhist prison work, Thích Nhât Hanh's work in the West, and issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Queen, C. S. and King, S. B. (1996) (eds) *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

A study of Socially Engaged Buddhism in Asia, with chapters separately addressing Dr Ambedkar, the dalit Buddhists, Sarvodaya Shramadana, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Liberation Movement, Thích Nhât Hanh and the Buddhist peace movement in Vietnam, Sulak Sivaraksa, Buddhist nuns, and the Sōka Gakkai.

Rinpoche, S. (2006) *Uncompromising Truth for a Compromised World: Tibetan Buddhism and Today's World*, Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom.

The uncompromising philosophy, principled nonviolence, and vision for Tibet of the recent Kalon Tripa of the Tibetan government in exile.

11 Buddhist Ethics: A Critique

Damien Keown

Buddhist ethics in the West

Buddhism is widely respected as one of the world's most ethical religions, and I have no wish to disagree with that assessment. As scholarship advances, however, more critical attention is being paid both to the historical record of Buddhism in Asian societies, and to its contribution to contemporary issues and debates. This chapter describes some of the challenges facing Buddhist ethics as traditional teachings are updated and refocused to address the needs of modern times.

It is only since Buddhism arrived in the West that a nascent discipline of Buddhist ethics has developed. By 'Buddhist ethics' here I mean not the body of moral teachings attributed to the Buddha, but the systematic study of those teachings from a philosophical perspective. In the West this activity is known as 'ethics' and today it is typically carried out by scholars working in university departments of philosophy. The origins of this discipline go back to the ancient Greeks, but it is a branch of learning that seems not to have existed in Buddhism, at least not in its formative classical phase (by this I mean roughly the first millennium of its existence in India). Whether it can be found in other parts of Buddhist Asia is a question I will leave to specialists in those regions to determine.

Given this historical lacuna, the voice of Buddhism has – with a few exceptions – been muted on issues of an ethical, political, social, and scientific nature. The traditional teachings provide only rudimentary guidance, and it is often far from clear how dilemmas should be resolved in concrete cases. The moral intuition of enlightened teachers is no doubt an excellent guide, but few can lay claim to such a finely-tuned conscience, and if the moral judgment of Japanese Zen masters during the Second World War is anything to go by (discussed below in the section on 'War' on page 221), such intuitions can be dangerously flawed (Victoria 1997: 2003). The injunction to be compassionate, frequently encountered in Buddhist sources, is also commendable, but being compassionate to both parties in a dispute does not necessarily help resolve it. Better tools are needed than the tradition has made available, and this is an area in which the West, with its greater expertise in the secular sciences of politics, ethics, law, and economics, seems well equipped to lend a hand.

The beginnings of the new discipline of Buddhist ethics can conveniently be dated to 1964 when Winston King, lamenting 'the almost total lack of contemporary material on Buddhist ethics in English' (King 1964: 5) raised general questions about the role of ethics in Buddhism. More or less coinciding with the birth of Buddhist ethics was the appearance of an important new movement known as 'engaged Buddhism.' While the discipline of Buddhist ethics explores mainly theoretical issues, engaged Buddhism focuses on questions of public policy such as social and economic justice, poverty, violence, gender, and the environment. However, there is clearly a connection between them, and they interface at various points, for example on questions concerning human rights and social justice. It can hardly be

a coincidence that Buddhist ethics and engaged Buddhism have arisen at roughly the same time as Buddhism encounters the West, and perhaps we should see them as corresponding to two of the major branches of Western thought – ethics and political science – that for one reason or another never attained an autonomous status in the canon of Buddhist learning. Thus although social and political issues such as kingship, war, crime, and poverty are mentioned in the Pāli canon and later scriptures, these subjects were rarely explored by thinkers in the classical tradition, who seem to have had little interest in developing moral or political theories (the same may be said of the Indian philosophical tradition more broadly). The concept of justice, for example, is seldom – if ever – mentioned in Buddhist literature, yet today social justice has become one of the main concerns of engaged Buddhism.

By virtue of its readiness to employ such new tools to address social issues, engaged Buddhism has become so important that one Buddhist scholar – Christopher Queen – has argued (2000) that it has become a new 'vehicle,' joining the previously identified three vehicles of Buddhism (Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna). The transformation that this new vehicle needs to bring about is a challenging one, and there is a good deal of work to be done in updating traditional beliefs so that they can speak convincingly to contemporary problems. Sometimes it seems the 'fast forward' button has been pressed too enthusiastically, and Buddhism is depicted as holding 'enlightened' views on any number of contemporary issues, when these have hardly been mentioned in traditional sources, or the evidence is ambiguous or even points in the opposite direction. Thus Buddhism is depicted as eco-friendly, a defender of individual rights, strongly anti-war, and (in the field of sexual ethics) 'pro-choice' and tolerant of same-sex relationships, in a manner that coincides neatly with modern liberal and green agendas. This anachronistic construction of Buddhism (let us call it 'liberal Buddhism') seems to owe as much to the rejection of certain traditional Western values as it does to the views of Buddhism itself, and if Buddhism is the 'good guy,' it is not hard to imagine who the 'bad guy' is. The blame for many of today's problems is often laid at the door of orthodox Western religion, and in particular Christianity, which is charged with being destructive of the environment, conservative, authoritarian, repressive, sexist, and stained in the blood of countless religious wars. While these stereotypes of both Western religion and Buddhism contain some truth, the reality is more complex. In particular, the Buddhist position (if we can speak of such a thing) is much less clear and coherent on many issues than is commonly supposed. I will illustrate the nature of the problem with three examples that will occupy us for the rest of the chapter: ecology, human rights, and war. These are all issues on which Buddhism is widely perceived as being on the side of the angels, but where the justification for this view in Buddhist teachings or practice, I will suggest, is weaker than might be thought.

Ecology

Buddhism is widely regarded as an 'eco-friendly' religion with an expanded moral horizon encompassing not just human beings but also animals and the environment. It is generally thought to have a more 'enlightened' attitude to nature than Christianity, which has traditionally taught that mankind is the divinely appointed steward of creation holding authority over the natural order. Buddhism, by contrast, is perceived as pursuing a path of harmonious integration with nature and as fostering identification and mutual respect within the natural world.

While there may be some truth in the view that Buddhism is more benign in its attitude toward nature than Christianity, the idea that Buddhism is deeply in tune with 'green' values and a natural ally of the 'animal rights' and other activist movements requires qualification. There is no doubt that Buddhist literature contains many references to animals and the environment, but when the context of these references is examined they often turn out to have little in common with the modern conservationist agenda or concern to reduce animal suffering. Human beings remain the primary focus of Buddhist teachings, and since the basic aim of Buddhism is to guide human beings from the darkness of suffering (*duḥkha*) to the light of liberation, this should come as no surprise. In adopting what is in many respects an anthropomorphic position (the view that value belongs to humans alone and nature is to be protected for their sake and no other), the Buddhist view of nature may not be as far removed from the Christian one as is sometimes thought.

At first sight Buddhist texts appear to support the view that animals must be respected. The first precept has a direct bearing on the treatment of animals since it prescribes non-violence not just towards human beings but to '*pāṇā*' or 'creatures.' The *Sutta Nipāta* categorically states: 'Let him neither kill, nor cause to be killed any living being, or let him approve of others killing, after having refrained from hurting all creatures, both those that are strong and those that tremble in the world' (v.393). A categorical ban is imposed on hunting, butchering and other similar professions (M.i.343). All the above directives are clearly directed towards the protection of animals. The Mahāyāna emphasis on the 'great compassion' (*mahā-karuṇā*) of *bodhisattva*s, and the Yogācāra notion of the 'embryonic Buddha' (*tathāgata-garbha*) that holds that the universal seed of Buddhahood is present in all living beings – including animals – further strengthen the ethical identification between self and others which is important to ecological concern.

Yet although evincing concern for their suffering, Buddhist sources show little interest in understanding the nature of animals. It is clear that they are held to suffer pain, but beyond that their status is ambiguous. Sometimes animal birth is praised (M.i.341), but most commonly it is denounced as brutal and lowly (M.iii.169). However, Buddhist literary sources often misrepresent the true reality of animal life. In some texts animals are given characteristics they do not have, and their biological



Figure 11.1 A monk in Sri Lanka tries to prevent slash and burn agricultural practices (burning grassland to expand farmland) that damage the environment

reality is made obscure. The anthropomorphic portrayal of animals in the *Jātakas* and elsewhere has little to do with ecological concern, and the random association of moral qualities with certain species in these stories shows that Buddhism has little curiosity or interest in the animals themselves and uses them merely as symbols that represent human attributes.

The nature of plant life in Buddhism is similarly opaque. It is difficult to state definitively whether early Buddhism believed plants and vegetation to be on a par with other beings that suffer, or whether they were considered to be non-sentient. In popular belief, trees and plants merited respect as the abode of deities. This, however, remains an ambiguous criterion for ecology, for it could imply that a tree uninhabited by a deity can be cut down. It also suggests an interest in the protection of deities (theocentric) rather than the protection of trees (ecocentric).

As for the wilderness that forms an important part of the ecological agenda today, Buddhism gives no specific injunctions for its conservation, although aesthetic references to wild nature are found. For instance, the natural beauty of the Gosiṅga-sāla forest grove near Vesālī, full of perfumed trees in bloom, is described as very pleasing to the eye on a moonlit night (M.i.212). At the same time one has to be

aware that Buddhist literature also contains contrasting descriptions of opulent surroundings where trees and ponds made of gold and other precious material are glorified (D.iii.182). Such descriptions suggest that the beauty of civilization was valued just as much as the beauty of the wilderness.

One of the most effective arguments for preserving the wilderness lies in what has come to be known as the 'hermit strand' in Buddhism. Identified initially by Lambert Schmithausen (1977), this strand has to do with the advice given to hermits to live in natural surroundings in order to pursue the path of liberation without distraction (for example M.i.274). The Buddha himself chose to dwell in forests in order to pursue spiritual ideals (D.iii.54), and the fact that the main events in his life – such as his birth, enlightenment, first sermon, and death – all took places under trees or in parks seems to associate him with natural environments. The basis of the hermit strand, however, is once again anthropocentric, since the forest suits the particular needs of the hermit, and anthropocentrism is generally berated in environmental literature. The alternative view, that all beings are equal and consequently deserve equal moral consideration, is not easy to establish on Buddhist principles. Instead, Buddhism seems to assume a hierarchical structure among the living creatures in the universe. In the Buddhist description of saṃsāra six realms or *gatis* are enumerated. These are hell, the animal realm, the ghostly world, the titans, human beings, and the heavenly realm (D.iii.264). It is worth noting that a 'precious human rebirth' is given special prestige, even greater than that of rebirth among the gods.

Even though a natural hierarchy seems to exist, Buddhist literature does not make use of this structure to discuss matters such as species conservation or selective conservation, which are issues that must be dealt with in modern ecology. In other words, there is no detailed discussion about a hierarchy within the animal kingdom itself or among the plant and animal kingdoms. This makes it difficult to address questions concerning which species should be saved, and the relative value between them. Different types of species are scarcely identified, let alone ranked in terms of those which are more deserving of moral consideration.

The practice of conservation can also lead to a conflict with *ahiṃsā* or non-violence. For example, would Buddhism approve of a conservation measure that required the culling of some animals, even if such killing were ultimately to preserve the balance of the natural world? The Mahāyāna answer to this might introduce the concept of skillful means (*upāya-kauṣalya*). Skillful means allow precepts to be relaxed or broken to varying degrees by a *bodhisattva* when done selflessly and for the welfare and happiness of other beings. However, applying skillful means with reference to the environment is a complicated issue and raises prior questions of the kind identified above, such as *why* the welfare of some species is to be considered more important than others.

A problem that invariably arises in any discussion of animals is vegetarianism. Among early texts, the *Jīvaka Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* sheds some light on the

question, even though there are no specific injunctions affirming or prohibiting it. The *sutta* describes various actions that have to be done in the slaughter of an animal, and each of these steps is seen as an evil deed deserving of demerit. It is important, at the same time, to note that in the *Jīvaka Sutta* the Buddha allowed monks to accept and eat the meat that was offered to them on their alms rounds if they had not seen, heard, or suspected that the animal was killed for their sake. The earliest sources depict the Buddha as following a non-vegetarian diet and even resisting an attempt to make vegetarianism compulsory for monks. Many take this as confirmation that the Buddha had no objection to meat-eating, but it may equally well have been the case that since meat eating was a widespread and accepted practice in the Buddha's time, accepting meat in alms was allowed for practical purposes. By allowing meat to be taken as alms food the Buddha may also have wanted to encourage the growth of non-attachment as a means to spiritual development.

The Mahāyāna, however, categorically denounces the eating of meat. The eighth chapter of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* is a good example of the various reasons often cited in support of vegetarianism by the Mahāyāna. These include that meat-eating causes terror to living beings, acts as a hindrance to liberation, and causes personal distress such as bad dreams and so on. An appeal is also based on the cycle of transmigration where the animal to be slaughtered may have been one's mother, father, or relative in another lifetime.

Vegetarianism is just one of a range of issues which concern the treatment of animals. Questions can also be raised about animal experimentation in scientific research and the practice of vivisection. Vivisection in recent times has come to symbolize unnecessary cruelty to animals and a disregard for their suffering. Since, as mentioned above, Buddhism is a champion of compassion and non-violence, cruel and painful animal experimentation would be unacceptable. But this issue is not as simple as it appears, especially if the value given to other beings is not egalitarian but relative, in which case it appears that causing suffering to animals for human gain may be permissible. This suggests that experimenting on a beagle in order to cure a Buddha may also be acceptable for the same reason, particularly if the experiments do not cause pain.

Similar problems arise in the case of pest control. Would a farmer who uses insecticides and pesticides in order to raise a healthy crop be acting immorally given the relativity of value among humans and other species? Clearly it would be better if insecticides were not needed, but if their use produces a larger crop which feeds more human beings, one can see an argument for employing them. This kind of conflict arises in other situations, as when insects or vermin infest a dwelling.

The above discussion shows that it is not an easy matter to classify Buddhism simply as 'ecologically friendly' or otherwise. Buddhist attitudes towards the natural world are complex and at times contradictory. On the one hand, references to plants

and animals prove Buddhism's awareness of the world of nature; on the other, the importance given to human beings as well as the fact that ultimate value is given to the pursuit of liberation leaves a clear impression that for South Asian Buddhism, at least, the natural world has at best a secondary or instrumental value. In some schools of East Asian Buddhism, by contrast, important figures like Chan-jan, Chi-t'sang, Dōgen, Kukai, Ryōgen, and Saichō, for example, describe plants as beings capable of reaching enlightenment, or of already having done so. Despite their later origins, views of this kind seem to offer a more promising foundation for Buddhist environmentalism. The fundamental question, however, is to what degree the aim of redeeming saṃsāra by restoring its ecological balance forms a central aspect of Buddhist teachings. The facts that many basic doctrines (such as the Four Noble Truths) depict the world as inherently flawed and imperfect, and that traditional Buddhist cosmology suggests that the universe is destined for destruction at the end of each cosmic period, seem to cast a shadow over the prospects for a Buddhist ecology.

Human rights

From a Buddhist perspective, human rights are a subject of relatively recent interest. Accordingly, we should not expect much explicit help from the ancient authorities when we come to consider this question. Some scholars, of whom Toru Shiotsu is one, in fact see Buddhism as having played a negative role historically regarding personal rights and freedoms, and draw attention to the collusion of Buddhism with state institutions of repression and control, as happened, for example, during the Edo period (1600–1867) in Japan. Shiotsu expresses doubt as to whether Japanese Buddhism even today has been 'intellectually liberated from the legacy and constraints of past institutionalization' (Shiotsu 1999: 62), and complains about 'the state of intellectual atrophy that has resulted in Buddhism's avoidance of active engagement in the issues of the day' (ibid.). At the same time, human rights is an issue which affects the daily lives of Buddhists around the world, and is a matter of some urgency for large numbers of people. Leading Asian Buddhists – such as the Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi, A. T. Ariyratne, and Sulak Sivaraksa – are often heard expressing their concern about social injustice using the vocabulary of human rights. Many institutions have been set up by Buddhists to campaign for human rights in different parts of the world, for example the Cambodian Institute of Human Rights, the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, and the Thai National Human Rights Commission. Human rights, however, is a Western concept that was unknown in Asia until modern times, and to make this modern discourse intelligible and relevant to Buddhism it appears that some intellectual bridgework needs to be put in place. However, it is far from clear how this is to be done.

It might be helpful to begin the discussion with a concrete Western example of a human rights charter, and the best candidate for this seems to be the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1948. Since its promulgation this 30-article code has been used as a model for many subsequent human rights charters. The rights proclaimed by the Universal Declaration include the right to life, liberty, security of person, equality before the law, privacy, marriage and protection of family life, social security, participation in government, work, protection against unemployment, rest and leisure, a minimum standard of living, and enjoyment of the arts. The document understands the rights it proclaims as both 'universal' and exceptionless. Such rights, however, and in particular the welfare rights such as social security, have no precedent in Buddhist teachings.

The various declarations on human rights such as the UN Charter rarely offer a justification for the rights they proclaim. A gesture towards justification is sometimes made in recital clauses by reference to the 'inherent dignity ... of all members of the human family' or some similar form of words. It is by no means apparent, however, how human dignity is to be grounded in Buddhist doctrine. The very words 'human dignity' sound as alien in a Buddhist context as talk of rights. One looks in vain to basic doctrines such as the Four Noble Truths for any explicit reference to human dignity, and doctrines such as no-self (*anatta*) and impermanence (*anicca*) may even be thought to undermine it. If human dignity is the basis of human rights, Buddhism would seem to be in some difficulty when it comes to providing a justification for them.

One authentically Buddhist candidate for the necessary foundation for human rights is compassion. The Buddhist virtue of compassion (*karuṇā*) encourages us to develop the human capacity for empathy to the point where we can identify fully with the suffering of others. Some texts, for example the eighth chapter of the Bodhicāryāvatāra, speak of 'exchanging self and other' and recommend a meditational practice in which we imaginatively place ourselves in the other's situation so that their predicament seems as real to us as it does to them. A number of commentators have suggested that compassion provides a Buddhist foundation, or perhaps a replacement, for human rights and regard it as preferable in two ways: first, because it has an authentic Buddhist pedigree; and secondly, because it is directed outwards to others rather than towards oneself.

A serious attempt to ground human rights in compassion has been made by Jay Garfield (1998). While not rejecting the benefits secured by rights, Garfield highlights the limitations of the liberal philosophy underlying them, and believes we need a deeper motivation if we are to improve the lot of others. He finds this motivation in Buddhist compassion, and suggests we make compassion our moral bedrock while constructing on top of it 'an edifice of rights ... as a device for extending the

reach of natural compassion and for securing the goods that compassion enables to all persons in a society' (Garfield 1998: 124) These rights will then become the 'tools with which each individual can protect him/herself and achieve his/her own flourishing'. He adds, 'These tools will be available even when our compassion or those of others fails, and can even be used as rhetorical vehicles to reawaken that compassion' (ibid.).

I think the problems with this approach are clear from the last sentence, in which rights are described as 'tools' and 'rhetorical vehicles.' Human rights here would come into being as the product of an agreement or convention among compassionate people. But what if this initial moral consensus cannot be found because the necessary feeling of compassion is absent? Many modern states (even traditionally Buddhist ones such as Burma/Myanmar) seem to care little for their citizens, so it is not clear how compassion would move the authorities to agree to a framework of human rights in the first place. The first weakness of compassion as a foundation for human rights, then, is that it may be impossible to forge a compassionate consensus. The second is that compassion is a feeling or sentiment, and as we know, feelings come and go. Any convention on human rights that was eventually established would be subject to change and variation if the underlying sentiment changed, as it often does when countries go to war, for example. While Buddhas and advanced *bodhisattva*s may feel compassion at all times for all sentient beings, most ordinary mortals do not and never will. This makes the compassionate treatment of others in the everyday world conditional upon a fluctuating emotional state. If I am not feeling particularly compassionate today, my reason for respecting the rights of others will be weaker. Charities refer to the phenomenon of 'compassion fatigue,' which occurs when compassion dries up in the wake of successive disaster appeals, and people feel they have no more left to give. Perhaps compassion can periodically be 'reawakened' as Garfield suggests, but it seems odd that individuals should have to awaken compassion in others in order to secure their basic rights. It seems we need something more fundamental than rights that can be removed simply because those with the power to bestow them undergo a change of heart. This approach might be more successful if compassion were understood more in the sense of Christian *agape*, as a disposition of the will rather than a sentiment, but it would still face a third problem, that of subjectivity.

The problem here is that a feeling of compassion is external to the person who is the recipient of that compassion. Human rights doctrines normally see A's rights as intrinsic to A and not dependent upon anything external to that person, whether it be other individuals, society, or the state. To make human rights dependent on others is to shift the locus from the individual holder of rights to others who, in this case, bestow compassion, thereby stripping the subject of what should be inalienable rights and turning him or her instead into an object of charity. Compassion is an admirable

virtue, and can provide an important impulse to fulfill obligations to others, but using it as a foundation for human rights seems problematic.

I think there are alternative and better foundations for human rights in Buddhism, as I have argued elsewhere (Keown 2000). In essence I believe these are to be found in the notion of human dignity, a concept we do not hear much about in Buddhism, but which I think is presupposed in the basic Buddhist belief that all beings have the capacity to attain nirvana. In Mahāyāna Buddhism the idea developed that all beings possess the 'Buddha nature' and so are 'embryonic Buddhas,' a development that seems to provide an ideal foundation for notions of human dignity and equality. When the concept of human dignity is linked to Dharma – a term encompassing a cluster of moral concepts which in the West are labelled separately, such as justice, rights, and duty – the prospects for grounding a Buddhist doctrine of human rights seem brighter. However, the matter is far from resolved, and scholarly debate seems set to continue for many years. Leading Buddhists, meanwhile, continue to use human rights language on a daily basis, although I think many would find it a challenge to provide a convincing justification in terms of Buddhist doctrine.

War

In the aftermath of '9/11', Buddhist writer and activist Stephen Batchelor wrote, 'The attacks in New York and Washington burst my complacent Buddhist bubble' (Batchelor 2001). In line with this new vein of realism, attention has been drawn in recent years to an apparent disparity between what Buddhism preaches, and what it practices with respect to issues such as war and terrorism. Recent historiography suggests that Buddhists have regularly participated in wars, and have justified this using arguments similar to those found in the Western 'just war' tradition, although in a less systematic format. There thus appears to be a contradiction between Buddhism's pacifist teachings, and the willingness of Buddhists to resort to armed force.

Traditional Buddhist teachings strongly oppose the use of violence, analyzing it in psychological terms as the product of greed (*rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*) and delusion (*moha*). The false belief in a self (*ātman*) and a desire to protect that self against 'others' who are thought to threaten it, is seen as one of the underlying causes of aggression. Buddhism holds that drawing a sharp boundary between self and others leads to the construction of a self-image that sees all that is not of 'me and mine' (such as those of another country, race, or creed) as alien and threatening. When this strong sense of self is reduced by practicing Buddhist teachings, such egocentric preoccupations are thought to subside and be replaced by a greater appreciation of the kinship among beings. This dissipates the fear and hostility that engender conflict, and so removes one of the main causes of violent disputes. When threatened, Buddhists are encouraged to practice patience (*kṣānti*), and there are many stories of exemplary

patience as well as practices designed to cultivate toleration and forbearance. Anger is seen as a negative emotion that only serves to inflame situations and inevitably rebounds, causing negative karmic consequences. When asked in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (i.47) what is the one thing whose killing he approves of, the Buddha replies that the noble ones praise (only) the killing of anger.

Early Buddhist literature contains numerous references to war, and the view expressed almost unanimously in the texts is that since war involves killing, and killing is a breach of the first precept, it is morally wrong to fight in either offensive or defensive wars. In marked contrast to the teachings of the Qur'an, the Buddha states (Sn iv.308–11) that warriors who die in battle go not to heaven but to a special hell, since at the moment of death their minds are intent on killing living beings. A legend in the commentary to the *Dhammapāda* narrates how the Buddha's kinsmen, the Śākyas, offered only token resistance when attacked by King Viḍūḍabha, and allowed themselves to be slaughtered rather than break the precept against taking life. The *Jātakas* contain stories concerning princes and kings who were so horrified by violence that they renounced their kingdoms to become ascetics or refused to defend themselves in the face of attack.

An exception to this pacifist stance is an early Mahāyāna source known as the Satyakaparivarta. Dating probably to the second century CE, this text uses Mahāyāna concepts such as compassion and skillful means to justify warfare, torture, and harsh punishments. In the words of Stephen Jenkins, this source states that 'Torture can be an expression of compassion. Capital punishment may be encouraged ... Celestial bodhisattvas ... support campaigns of conquest to spread the influence of Buddhism, and kings vested with the dharma commit mass violence against Jains and Hindus' (Jerryson and Juergensmeyer 2010: 59). At the same time, in the manner of the *Arthaśāstra*, the text sets out a kind of proto-just war philosophy which argues that warfare can only be pursued when other means have failed, and that kings should try first of all to befriend, then help, then intimidate, before resorting to war. Nevertheless, the idea that political violence could even be contemplated takes us a long way from the pacifist Buddha of the Pāli canon who never condones the use of violence under any circumstances.

Turning from theory to practice, the pacifist ideal of the classical sources has not prevented Buddhists from fighting battles and conducting military campaigns from a mixture of political and religious motives. The historical background to the Buddhist involvement in war in different countries has been conveniently surveyed by Peter Harvey (2000), and documented further in recent scholarly studies (see the 'Further reading' section). The early history of Sri Lanka was convulsed by war between Sinhalese and Tamils, and King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi (first century BCE) is regarded as a national hero for defeating the Tamil general Eḷāra who had invaded the island from South India. Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's victory was glorified in a famous chronicle known as the

Mahāvaṃsa (fifth to sixth century CE), which relates that his army was accompanied by Buddhist monks and that Buddhist relics adorned his spear, or more likely his standard. Monks disrobed and joined the army to fight in what the chronicle depicts as a 'holy war,' a rather surprising concept to find in Buddhism.

In the modern period, Buddhist religious groups have had a close involvement with Japanese nationalism and militarism. The Zen and Pure Land denominations provided financial support for the 1937–45 war with China, and in the Second World War most Buddhist schools (with the notable exception of Sōka Gakkai) supported the Japanese war effort against the allies. In his book *Zen at War* (1997), Brian Victoria has exposed the extent to which many well-known Zen masters were enthusiastic advocates of war, to the surprise and embarrassment of many of their pacifist Western followers. During the recent civil war in Sri Lanka, Buddhist monks regularly held services for the army, and today there are Buddhist chaplains serving in the Thai, Korean, and US armed forces.

A detailed study of the anti-Japanese war between Japan and China has been done by Xue Yu (2005), who has also written about the participation of Chinese monks and nuns in the Korean War. One of these, the Ven. Xindao, made an address in 1951 in which he stated, 'To wipe out the American imperialist demons, who are destroying world peace, is in accordance with Buddhist doctrines; it is not only blameless, but will actually give rise to merit as well' (Yu 2010: 145). Examples of this kind could be found in virtually every region of Buddhist Asia, from China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. In fact, these are all regions covered in the recent volume on *Buddhist Warfare* by Michael Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer (2010). Publications such as this one make it clear that we are not talking about isolated cases of Buddhists fighting wars so much as the systematic and sustained involvement by Buddhists, both lay and monastic, in wars over many centuries. Writing in the introduction to this volume, Michael Jerryson states, 'The motivations for this volume are many, but chief among them is the goal of disrupting the social imaginary that holds Buddhist traditions to be exclusively pacifist and exotic' (Jerryson and Juergensmeyer 2010: 3). He goes on, 'The chapters in this volume investigate this dark underbelly of Buddhisms, with particular attention to the monastic interplay with warfare' (ibid.: 4).

In light of the above it seems that early Buddhist pacifism was superseded by a 'just war' philosophy, except that no consistent arguments were advanced by Buddhists to support this position. As Perry Schmidt-Leukel says, 'political responsibility does not really allow the choice between violence and non-violence. The only realistic choice is between lawful, just and well-intentioned violence on the one hand, and lawless, unjust, and evil-motivated forms of violence on the other' (Schmidt-Leukel 2004: 45). Rather than face these alternatives squarely, however, Buddhists have tried to steer a dubious 'middle way' between them, relying on justifications that are unconvincing.

The most common justification one comes across for Buddhists taking life in

war is compassion. However, this idea is problematic in several respects. First, there is a need to be cautious with respect to any claim that the rules of morality can be overridden for subjective reasons. This can easily turn into a justification for doing whatever one wishes simply because one claims to feel compassion. Second, the textual examples of compassionate killing usually concern advanced *bodhisattva*s, not ordinary mortals. Third, it is not entirely clear how these texts (which, of course, apply only to Mahāyāna Buddhism) are to be interpreted, whether literally or metaphorically. Fourth, many Mahāyāna texts that emphasize compassion also condemn killing unequivocally. For example, the *Sutra on Upasaka Precepts* quotes the Buddha as saying, 'Good son, the bodhisattva mahasattva has compassion and does not kill for immeasurable lives; for this reason he obtains a long life' (Shih 1994: 57). Indeed, there is something paradoxical about the claim that compassion can justify killing, since the great majority of sources state that it is out of compassion that one *refrains* from killing. In the Pāli canon the Buddha is often described as one who has 'laid aside the stick and the sword and dwells compassionate and kind to living beings' (D.i.4). Fifth, we may wonder whether there are any limits to what can be done in the name of compassion. As Brian Victoria asks, is it really conceivable that the kind of mass slaughter associated with modern warfare could be an expression of wisdom and compassion (Jerryson and Juergensmeyer 2010: 126)? Can torture and genocide be justified expressions of compassion, or is it more likely than anyone capable of doing such things has in reality abandoned all moral standards? Sixth, any moral analysis should distinguish between the intention, as the immediate object to which one directs one's will, and the motive from which one does the act. For example, someone may rob a bank in order to send money to help earthquake victims. Here the intention is to rob, and the motive is to reduce suffering. Regardless of the good motive, however, the act is wrong because it involves the intention to steal. The same applies to compassionate killing: The motive may be compassion, but there is also an intention to kill, and in that respect the act is wrong. Seventh, introducing the idea of compassion at all seems a red herring, since most wars are not motivated by compassion but by a state's concerns over its security, territory, or national sovereignty. Finally, the notion of compassionate killing falls well short of providing a comprehensive theory that explains either in what circumstances it is morally justified to go to war, or how that war should be conducted.

In conclusion, it seems that Buddhists face a clear choice over the question of war and peace. One option is to respect the principle of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) as set out in the early teachings and shown in the behaviour of the Buddha. The lesson Buddhist history teaches, however, is that this ideal is unattainable by other than a very few, and it seems that a more realistic policy needs to be developed if Buddhists are to resort to the use of force, as they frequently do. It seems that something along the

lines of Western just war theory is needed, setting out in what circumstances the use of force is justified (*jus ad bellum*), and the principles that will guide combat once battle is joined (*jus in bello*).

Summary

- The popular image of Buddhism as 'green', deeply committed to human rights, and a champion of peace may not be entirely mistaken, but it is far from the whole picture. It rests to some degree on an inverted 'orientalism' that sees Eastern values as inherently superior to Western ones, and a certain naivety on the part of some Westerners who – perhaps dissatisfied with their own tradition – seek a spiritual alternative which they believe to have a cleaner and more liberal record.
- With its considerable intellectual energy, Buddhism certainly has the potential to make a contribution to the ecological, political and military crises faced by the modern world, but identifying the distinctive nature of this contribution will require a more critical engagement with the issues than has occurred to date.
- While Buddhism has undoubted strengths in the fields of psychology and metaphysics, time will tell whether these resources alone are sufficient to address the complex practical problems of the modern world. The lack of a body of ethical theory in Buddhism is a significant handicap, as is the absence of reflection in classical sources on political science, law, and economics.
- Although the characterization of Buddhism as 'otherworldly' by an earlier generation of scholars was certainly overdone, Buddhism has tended either to remain ideologically detached from everyday life and too invested in the pursuit of metaphysical theories, or to plunge into worldly affairs too deeply (as in the case of its involvement in warfare) without first laying the necessary ethical groundwork. As its encounter with the West unfolds, a more balanced 'middle way' needs to be found.

Discussion questions

- Is Buddhism better off with – or without – ethical theories? Is the study of ethics useful, or does it just produce confusing arguments that get in the way of doing what's right?
- Which do you think has a more positive attitude towards animals and the environment: Buddhism or Christianity?
- Does Buddhism need a concept of 'human rights' or can it get by quite well without one?

- How can Buddhists justify fighting wars? Does it make any difference whether the war is defensive or offensive?
- Do you think Westerners tend to idealize Eastern religions like Buddhism?

Further reading

General introductions to Buddhist ethics

Harvey, P. (2000) *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A comprehensive introductory textbook covering a broad range of issues and providing extensive references to original texts and modern sources.

Keown, D. (2005) *Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Provides a brief general introduction and overview of the subject, including discussion of the environment, sexuality, war and terrorism, and medical ethics.

The environment

Badiner, A. H. (1990) *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

A large volume offering a comprehensive treatment of the subject, mostly from an activist perspective.

Cooper, D. E. and James, S. P. (2005) *Buddhism, Virtue and Environment*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

A critical study of the philosophical foundations of Buddhist ecology.

James, S. P. (2004) *Zen Buddhism and Environmental Ethics*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Similar in approach to Cooper and James (2005) but focusing exclusively on Zen.

Sahni, P. (2007) *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism: A Virtues Approach*, New York, NY: Routledge.

A reflective analysis of the basis for Buddhist environmentalism drawing mainly on Pāli sources.

Human rights

Keown, D. *et al.* (1997) *Buddhism and Human Rights*, London: Curzon Press.

A collection of papers from an online conference hosted by the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, offering a range of different perspectives on the subject.

Meinert, C. and Zollner, H.-B. (2010) (eds) *Buddhist Approaches to Human Rights*, Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Offers interdisciplinary, regional and historical perspectives on human rights in Buddhism.

War

Bartholomeusz, T. J. (2002) *In Defence of Dharma. Just-war Ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka*, London: RoutledgeCurzon.

A thorough study of the history of religious conflict in Sri Lanka and the justification for Buddhist involvement.

Jerryson, M. K. and Juergensmeyer, M. (2010) *Buddhist Warfare*, Oxford, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Surveys the history of Buddhist participation in war in a variety of Asian countries and historical periods.

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Xue, Yu (2005) *Buddhism, War, and Nationalism: Chinese Monks in the Struggle Against Japanese Aggressions, 1931–1945*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Yu, Xue. (2010). “Buddhists in China during the Korean War (1951-1953)” in Jerryson and Juergensmeyer (2010), 131-156.

12 Buddhism and the Powers of the Mind

Richard K. Payne

Introduction: Buddhism and psychotherapy: Siblings? Friends? Lovers?

That Buddhism is primarily concerned with healing both of and by the mind appears to be firmly established in the popular conceptions of Buddhism. This contemporary discourse on Buddhism and psychology has generally been structured by one of three presumptions, each of which frames the discourse in a particular fashion, thereby preconditioning its development. These are that Buddhism is a precursor to psychotherapy, that Buddhism can be exploited for psychotherapeutic resources, and that Buddhism can be interpreted as a form of psychotherapy. The view that Buddhism is a precursor to psychotherapy is evident in the rhetorical glorification of Buddhist techniques as being confirmed by modern psychological sciences. This rhetorical strategy is frequently found throughout the religion and science discourse, but it can easily lead to the view that Buddhism is now outdated and irrelevant in the face of more effective, scientifically validated techniques. The second casts Buddhism as a vast resource of techniques and tools for psychotherapy. This is evident, for example, in much of the literature on mindfulness, which frequently treats meditation practice as something distinct from Buddhism (see, for example, Kabat-Zinn 1990: 12 and Siegel 2010: 31). The third form of the discourse, in which Buddhism has been interpreted in terms of psychotherapy, is more subtle and more pervasive. And it is this that is of concern here. My contention is that Buddhism has not simply been interpreted psychologically. Rather, psychotherapy, modern occultism, and Buddhist modernism arise within the same cultural milieu, and the ease with which Buddhism is interpreted as psychotherapeutic is a consequence of that common background.

I. The inadequacy of 'interpretation'

The motivating question for this study is, why is Buddhism now understood primarily as a form of psychotherapy? How did we get here? 'Psychotherapy' is being broadly defined here as healing – therapy – of and by the mind – psyche, as distinct from formal psychotherapy. As such, it is a cultural formation, found throughout the society, and not just in the offices of psychotherapists.

When I began this inquiry, I initially formulated the thesis as Buddhism having been interpreted psychologically. Framing the question this way, however, presumes the existence of some object – Buddhism – that is interpreted. The longer I pursued this inquiry, however, the clearer it became that there is no object to be interpreted. That is, this putative object of interpretation has no independent, autonomous existence. It is instead a social construct, an intersubjective entity, or in Buddhist terms, a *prapañca*. As such, it is not simply an always already interpreted object. It is a representation, the construction of which is itself a process of interpretation. This is a self-affirming

dialectic process, in that what has previously been selectively represented as Buddhism subsequently becomes the given, presumed actuality of Buddhism. This latter then implicitly becomes the standard for what counts as Buddhism. This self-referential validation of Buddhism in its modernist interpretation is evident in universalized claims as to what Buddhism 'really' is. This circularity of interpretation, a 'hermeneutic circle,' is 'vicious' because there are so many representations based on the idea of Buddhism's identity as a psychotherapy reinforcing that same interpretation for the creation of later representations.

Thus, my initial thesis – 'Buddhism interpreted by psychology' – failed because it treated one term of the relationship, Buddhism, as a stable, objective entity, and the other, psychology, as the authoritative, interpreting agent. Instead, modernist representations of Buddhism as psychotherapeutic are constructed, particularly in the period from the Civil War to the First World War, when modern occultism, psychotherapy, and Buddhist modernism were interacting in the same cultural milieux.

II. Three nodes

In order to talk about the psychotherapeutic representation of Buddhism central to Buddhist modernism, we cannot avoid employing one metaphoric system or another. Any metaphor has certain benefits and certain deficits. The creation of this representation of Buddhism is very complex, and any metaphor built around unilateral or even bilateral relations is going to either obscure certain relations, or itself break down in the attempt to describe them. The processes involved in the creation of this representation are more complex and form a dynamically interconnected religio-cultural system. Dynamic because it is an ongoing historical process, constantly changing. Interconnected because there are important relations between all of the elements. Religio-cultural because, while it is primarily religious in nature, it is also enmeshed with other values, beliefs and assumptions extending throughout society. And, a system in that there are certain clearly identifiable elements between which significant relations exist. This system is not closed, because new elements do enter into it, but semipermeable – not every element enters with equal freedom. It is also self-maintaining – new representations are determined by older ones within the same discursive realm. There is a Buddhist image from the Flower Garland sutra that expresses this complexity – the 'net of Indra.'

This refers to the net of jewels hung over Indra's palace at the top of Mount Sumeru at the center of the universe. At each node is a jewel that reflects every other jewel in the net, and thus each is interconnected with every other. The three elements already mentioned, occultism, psychotherapeutics, and Buddhist modernism, are three nodes in such a net. Each is dynamically interconnected with the other, as well as to other

nodes, including Romanticism, medical psychiatry, liberal Protestantism, conceptions of selfhood, and systems of social, political and economic organization. When we pull on any one of the three nodes, all of these others move as well.

In her study of the nineteenth-century New Thought movement, Beryl Satter uses the language of 'dominant ideologies,' and describes how in this period the dominant ideology shifted – 'a new discourse, that of psychology, gradually replaced evolutionary progress as the most common language Americans used to interpret both politics and selfhood' (Satter 1999: 217). This ideological shift corresponded to the transformation of the economic infrastructure of America 'from an industrial producer to a corporate consumer economy' (ibid.). This has been called the second industrial revolution, when the introduction of electricity not only transformed lifestyles, but also radically increased levels of industrial productivity (Chandler 1990; Hobsbawm 1987). In his study of the history of psychoanalysis Eli Zaretsky explains that 'Much of the response to the first industrial revolution had been pessimistic and reactionary, based on idealization of the preindustrial order. Responses to the second industrial revolution, in contrast, tended toward a future-looking optimism' (Zaretsky 2005: 68). The legacy of both responses is still with us. The first in Romantic nostalgia that valorizes the primitive, or premodern, seeing there the pure, the spontaneous, the simple, and the natural. The second in the sense of open-ended self-improvement through consumption.

Ideology, meaning here those conceptions foundational to society, constitutes a form of social knowledge that is so pervasive, so hegemonic, that it usually operates invisibly – 'a discourse which requires no justification because it seems to derive directly from the structure of the world' (Culler 1975: 164). It is 'naturalized,' making certain ideas so obviously true, *vraisemblant*, as to be beyond question, while other ideas are either incapable of expression or incomprehensible if they are. It is hard, for example, to form the idea that awakening is something other than a mental transformation of an individual person (Cohen 2006). The 'natural' response under the current psychotherapeutic ideology informing Buddhist modernism would no doubt be an uncomprehending, 'What else could it possibly be?' Each of the three nodes – modern occultism, psychotherapy, and Buddhist modernism – arose in the same religio-cultural milieux, and interacting together constitute a powerful ideological structure that has been naturalized by the reinforcing structures of consumerism.

Presently, modernity is often identified as rational, scientific, secular, and anti-clerical. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, 'the modern' was understood by many people as including the discovery of the reality of the spiritual world, that is, a material, if very subtle, empirically accessible reality. For example, 'ectoplasm' as the material substance of spirits was presented as a new discovery, one that validated religious and spiritual claims, particularly

the enduring postmortem existence of the dead. The real existence of the soul separate from the body, a topic of debate from before the time of Descartes up to present-day discussions in cognitive science, over the autonomy, separateness or independence of consciousness, was asserted against a background of increasing scientific knowledge. Darwin's evolutionary theory, for example, was 'extended' to a spiritual evolution, understood as an improvement not just of the species, but of the individual – still resonant in contemporary spiritual and mystical teachings as the 'evolution of consciousness' (for example Combs 2009, Wilber 1980). Thus, the modern era, far from being exclusively rational and materialistic, finds occultists – a range of metaphysical, magical, and spiritual practitioners acting outside established religion – actively employing the authority and new discoveries of science in support of a spiritual world view, which creates the 'occult modern.' Corinna Treitel has demonstrated that one of the intents of German occultists was to assist their audiences to adjust to the modern. One 'aimed to give his readers a new worldview that would enable them to meet the social demands of modern times' (Treitel 2004: 90; see also Styers 2004).

Studying the epistemological strategies of modern occultists, Olav Hammer has identified three discursive strategies they employ – scientism, the construction of tradition, and appeal to experience (Hammer 2001: 23). Regarding scientism, he notes that 'Authors within this tradition are rarely content with a blind leap of faith, but are conspicuously concerned with linking their claims with contemporary physics and biology' (ibid.: 10). This is evident in quite a number of contemporary publications on Buddhism and psychology, which adopt neuroscience and quantum physics as legitimating rhetorics. The construction of tradition is evident in the repeated claims of presenting the original or authentic teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha himself. Assertions that the Buddha taught control of the mind for the relief of suffering, for example, construct a certain representation in which the psychotherapeutic interpretation of Buddhism is legitimated as the 'original' teaching.

Appeal to experience also characterizes Buddhist modernism. The appeal to personal experience as epistemologically privileged has deep roots in Western religious culture, reinforced by American traditions of anti-intellectualism. By the end of the nineteenth century, theologians motivated by a desire to protect religion from scientific explanations focused on mystical experience as irreducible, that is, not subject to explanation (Jay 2005: 110–21). Expressed by Rudolf Otto (1923) and further interpreted by Mircea Eliade (1959), the idea enters the psychotherapeutic representation of Buddhism as the notion that meditation provides direct, unmediated experience of a higher, truer reality. Presented as universal and independent of doctrine, rhetorical claims to authority regarding Buddhism are made solely on the basis of meditative experience (see, for example, Young-Eisendrath 2008: 235).

At the interface of psychotherapy, occultism and Buddhism: C. G. Jung (1875–1961)

Carl Jung's life and thought spanned the formative period that gave rise to psychotherapy, modernizing occultism and Buddhist modernism. He was a leading figure in the early stages of European psychotherapy, being widely recognized even before his association with Freud. His father was a 'poor country parson' (Bair 2003: 7), but Jung moved away from the church, establishing in his own life the attitude of 'spiritual but not religious' that is familiar today, an attitude that gives importance to individual experiences of transcendence – of a reality greater or higher than the immediacies of human social existence. His own earliest work was motivated by an interest in spiritualism, and psychic phenomena (ibid.: 43). His experiences contributed to developing his concept of synchronicity, as well as his long-standing study of alchemy.

Perhaps the most pervasive of Jung's interpretations of Buddhism, which has come to be accepted as common knowledge, is his interpretation of the mandala as a psycho-cosmic symbol of wholeness. Here we see Jung finding an Asian analogue of his own ideas, particularly in light of his experiences creating such diagrams during the First World War (Jung 1961: 195–7). Recent studies demonstrate, however, that mandalas originate in ritual representations of medieval Indian imperial courts (Davidson 2002: 125–44).

As well informed as Jung was for his time, scholarship has advanced significantly since then, despite which – like D.T. Suzuki, see below – he is still treated in the popular religious culture as an expert on Buddhism. Most importantly, in his commentaries and other writings on Asian religions (Jung 1969b: part two), he is working out his own ideas – interpreting, not explaining.

III. Occultism and the formation of the psychotherapeutic

The founders of psychotherapy in the United States were quite self-conscious that the cultural context of their efforts was 'mind-cure.' Eric Caplan explains that, having 'unique ideas concerning the capacity of mental therapies to cure all diseases, the American mind-cure movement differed substantially from other nineteenth-century health reform and antimaterialist campaigns' (Caplan 1998: 10). It was against the exaggerated claims of mind-cure ('mental therapies were by themselves sufficient to cure all diseases' – ibid.: 62) that psychotherapy (the mind could cure mental diseases) had to distinguish itself. According to Zaretsky, psychoanalysis became popular in the United States in part because of 'the widespread belief in the power of the individual mind to overcome "external" difficulties,' and consequently 'was caught up in a process that emphasized personal empowerment, self-regulation, and individual charisma' (Zaretsky 2005: 76). Discussing the 'expansive, antinomian sense of self' long typical of American culture, Zaretsky suggests that:

> The frontier and mass democracy sustained this sense of boundlessness, which coexisted with self-improvement, sexual prudery, and commercialism. By the middle of the nineteenth century, American receptivity to the idea of mental healing was unparalleled in the world. In 1869 the first purely psychological theory of neurosis, neurasthenia, was put forth there.
>
> *(Zaretsky 2004: 77)*

Founders of the budding psychoanalytic movement saw mind-cure as a competitor against which they needed to clearly contrast themselves. For example, in 1908 Richard Cabot defended the use of the neologism ‘psychotherapy.’ Cabot said:

> Psychotherapy is a most terrifying word, but we are forced to use it because there is no other which serves to distinguish us from Christian Scientists, the New Thought people, the faith healers, and the thousand and one other schools which have in common the disregard for medical science and the accumulated knowledge of the past.
>
> *(Cabot 1908)*

Romanticism: beyond the clockwork mind

The contemporary notion of the creative power of the mind has its proximate roots in the Romantic revaluation of the emotions. While Enlightenment theories of the mind had emphasized rationality as primary, devaluing emotion and the irrational, the Romantics reversed this valuation. The Enlightenment view of reality, expressed most clearly by Pierre-Simon Laplace, was mechanistic. In this view the entire world, including the mind, is a clockwork. For Enlightenment thinkers, however, this was not simply descriptive, but normative – rationality was morally superior to emotion. It constituted that aspect of humanity closest to God, since His rationality was evident in the mechanical organization of the universe.

In their turn, the Romantics rejected a mechanical, rationalistic understanding of the mind, much less giving it moral primacy in human existence. Rather than reasoned insight, they valued creativity. For them, it was the non-rational, the emotional and inexplicably spontaneous that was the basis of creativity and the most valuable form of human thought (Day 1996).

This change in the conception of the mind was motivated by the failure of anatomical studies to locate any physiological basis for hysterias. Hypnosis (Mesmerism, suggestion), however, was able to both induce and cure hysteric symptoms. While such symptoms existed previously, they became particularly important when materialist theory, the ‘somatic paradigm,’ came to dominate medicine in the second half of the nineteenth century (Caplan 1998: 6–7). These

medical issues contributed to a conception of the mind as having unexplored potentials, not only negative powers capable of producing illness, but also powers of healing not previously realized (Harrington 2008: 39–66). Buddhist meditation entered this milieu and was seen as a tool for exploring, developing, refining these beneficial powers of the mind, an idea still found in popular presentations of Buddhism.

Parallel magics – the occult tradition in modernity

Running parallel to the 'mainline' of psychological theorizing were sidestreams of magical conceptions of the mind and its development. Paul MacDonald identifies the link between these magical conceptions and science, describing four major chronological stages, the last of which is the 'Early Modern period (*c*.1550–1700) when Hermetic, occult and magical ideas merge with, or are considered compatible with, advances in the scientific understanding of the natural world and humans' place in it' (MacDonald 2007: 300).

Beginning with Roger Bacon, MacDonald traces fascination with the exotic and occult through a variety of authors, culminating with Goethe and Blake, of whom he claims that 'Their mutual interest in exotic myths and occult imagery is closely allied with the chief values of Romanticism' (ibid.: 399). It is described by Martin Bidney as

> a project of pioneering introspection, aimed at discovering the sources of visionary power, so that each poet could write his or her own mythology, scripture or testament. [It] is intensified introspective individualism, with mythopoetic intent, and [its] enthusiasms tend to contribute to this project of making one's own interiorized myth, with the help of unexpected unusual sources.
>
> *(Bidney 1988: xiii, from MacDonald 2007: 399)*

Although expressed here in terms of the poet's task, the ideal of personal mythic creativity becomes characteristic of modern psychologized popular religion with its imagery of path and quest as the individual pursuit for authenticity, outside of, or in resistance to, religious institutions (Roof 1999: 63–4). Within such a framework, Buddhism becomes one of any number of exotic resources for becoming who one 'truly is' – manifesting oneself by creating one's own myth out of oneself. This project of self-creation sought out exotic resources, such as those of India, China and Japan – culminating for example in the universalizing mythology of Joseph Campbell. Not just poets and artists, but the goal for all humans, is defined as a self-referential, self-creating mythologizing. Interpreting all religions as 'ultimately the same,'

Perennialism rationalizes appropriating resources for self-creation from all religions, all mythologies – a spiritual colonialism.

At the interface of psychology and occultism: William James (1842–1910)

William James, best known as a founder of academic psychology in America, was for a period actively involved with spiritualism (Blum 2006, Richardson 2006: 257–64). This was not an aberration of some kind, a lapse from a modern commitment to empirical science, but integral to his psychological theorizing. Like Jung, his interest was both personal and theoretical. He was motivated by a conviction that the mind exists independently of the body.

James grew up in a family deeply imbued with the occult. His father, Henry James, Sr., was a deeply religious person, though like many in both that era and today, alienated from institutions and churches – 'spiritual but not religious.' James, Sr., was attracted to the writings of Swedenborg, a mystic who was a key inspiration for the emphasis on non-institutional religion, what Jeffrey Kripal has called the American 'religion of no religion' (Kripal 2007). The notion that direct, unmediated personal experience is indisputable, emphasized in contemporary popular religious culture, derives from James's discussion of mysticism as authoritative for the mystic (James 1902 [2008]: 297, Jay 2005). As important in giving legitimacy to the link between psychology and occultism as James was, the milieu of the occult modern was already deeply psychologized.

Occult modern

Occultism in the modern period developed a markedly psychological approach, seeing the individual subject as the source of power and growth. Treitel describes occultism in Germany at this time as one of several 'alternative modernities,' but having as its distinctive characteristic 'its embrace of a primarily *psychological* solution to the problems of modernity, an orientation it shared with all other non-German occult movements of the era' (Treitel 2004, 51). In response to modernity, occultism focused on the powers of the mind. At the same time, occultists also shared an interest in Oriental religions. Theosophy is a well-known instance of this, locating as it does the transcended masters in a Tibet both remote and imaginal. But other occultists of the era were also interested in the East. The explanatory subtitle of the *Metaphysische Rundschau* described it as a 'monthly journal for the study of practical metaphysics, psychology, oriental philosophy, and general occultism' (quoted in Treitel 2004: 52–3). These connections between occultism and psychotherapy mean that as Buddhist modernism was being created, any interaction with the one meant an interaction with the other.

IV. Occultism and the construction of Buddhism

Western familiarity with Buddhism is often traced back to Schopenhauer, and indeed, one still hears people say that they do not like Buddhism because it teaches that life is suffering, and meaningless – certainly echoes of Schopenhauer (Cartwright 2010: 275, Halbfass 1988: 105–20). However, Buddhism probably became familiar to more people through the writings of occultists such as Helena Blavatsky and Annie Besant than by reading philosophers like Schopenhauer. If we want to understand the early popular representations of Buddhism in the West that have structured later understandings, we need to look to the occultists (Hickey 2008a,b, Tweed 2005).

The involvement of Blavatsky and Olcott with Buddhism is well known (Chandler 2008, Prothero 1996). The relationship, however, is far from simple. Blavatsky identified Theosophy with Buddhism at some times, but at others asserted the superiority of Theosophy over common or popular Buddhism, which is cast as decadent (Stasulane 2008). One version of the relation between Buddhism and Theosophy is provided by A. P. Sinnett, President of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society, which published his *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883). He claims to transmit to the West an 'esoteric science': 'From Buddha's time till now the esoteric science referred to has been jealously guarded as a precious heritage belonging exclusively to regularly initiated members of mysteriously organized associations,' that is, the Arhats (Sinnett 1888: 4). Despite conflicting and contradictory positions, Theosophy was important for introducing ideas about Buddhism and the practice of meditation into popular religious culture.

Meditation: where three nodes meet

Contemporary Buddhist modernist emphasis on meditation has complex roots. It offered a Buddhist alternative to Christian contemplative prayer as an individualized religious practice, which could be pursued outside church institutions. It was also promoted as a kind of mental technology. Rhetorically stripped of any devotional or ritual connotations, it was, and still is, presented as universal and transcending any particular religion. Being defined as value-free and context-neutral, both American Methodists and Japanese Buddhists could meditate equally effectively. This technological interpretation of meditation not only made it seem modern and scientific, but also made it congruent with practices being promoted within occult and mind-cure groups as well. At the intersection of New Thought and Theosophy, for example, Annie Besant gave meditation a central role in her own teachings. Leigh Schmidt quotes Besant as saying that 'Anyone who determines to lead a spiritual life must daily devote some time to meditation.... Only to the mind concentrated, steady, shut out from the world, can the Divine reveal itself' (Schmidt 2005: 161). Schmidt

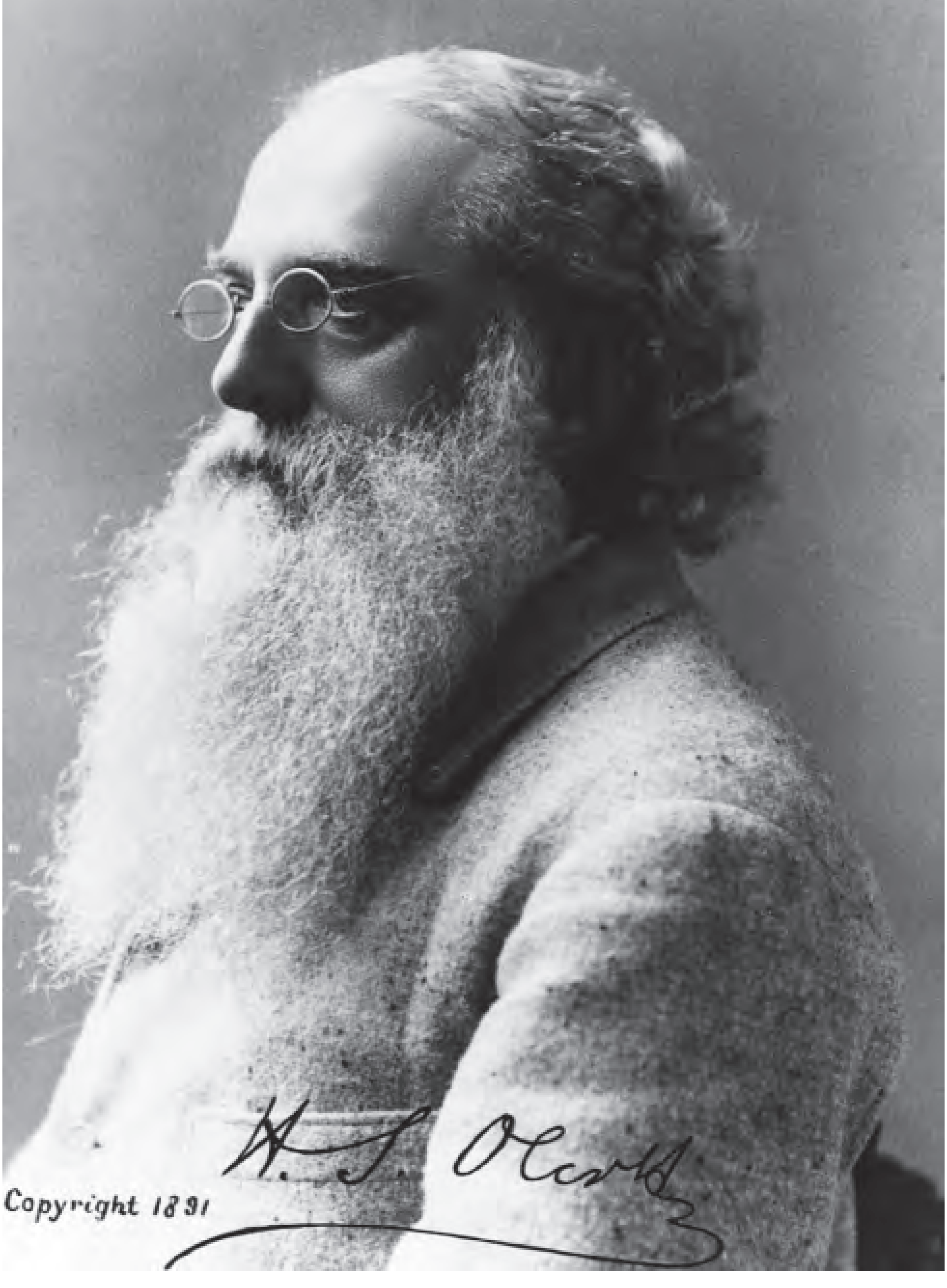


Figure 12.1 Henry S. Olcott (1832–1907), American theosophist

notes that meditation was a nexus of the multiply entangled interactions between occultism and Buddhist modernism:

> At the turn of the twentieth century, the new sources of meditation for Americans were diverse: New Thought, Unitarianism, liberal Judaism, Theosophy, Vedanta, and South Asian Buddhism crisscrossed one another in an intensive series of encounters and innovations. However distinct the metaphysical starting points of the various movements were, they all shared an absorbing concern with the concentrated mind – a curiosity that flowed from overlapping impulses, desires, and anxieties. These exchanges were global in reach, but the larger dynamic that held them together – or, at minimum, made possible productive alliances – was religious liberalism's imagining of an essential, universal, and practical spirituality in which meditation would serve as a technique held in common.
>
> *(Schmidt 2005: 170–1, cf. Hickey 2008a: 113–14)*

Meditation answered the hopes of liberal religion for a practice that allowed all religions to come together as equals. Claiming that Buddhist meditation is simply a more highly sophisticated and ancient form of a universal, context-neutral mental technology provided a culturally acceptable way for Buddhism to enter into Western society.

The magic of emptiness: overdetermining Buddhist modernism

Modern fascination with Buddhism was informed by the belief in mental powers such as telekinesis, bilocation, mind reading, astral travel, and so on. In the occult-magical world the mind could affect the material world directly, but only if it were focused enough, requiring proper training and control (Owen 2004: 114–47; for a modern example of this rhetoric see Wallace 2006). Belief in the unlimited powers of the mind meant not simply artistic creativity, but the magus bending the physical world to his will. The doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) has at times been interpreted in just such an occult fashion. This is exemplified in the image of the siddha as tantric magician, able to control reality because at the most profound level he knows the emptiness of all things.

The occult reading is overdetermined by the role of extraordinary powers (*iddhi*, *siddhi*) in Buddhism. The occult representation selects and interprets elements from the tradition that are congruent with its own pre-existing views, and then points to those as evidence, setting in motion a vicious hermeneutic circle. The promotion of Buddhism as a rational system of self-improvement employing a mental technology, and fully congruent with modern science, however, has tended to obscure the classic treatments of these powers (see Quli 2008). When mentioned, they are explained away

as 'real enough, but a distraction.' Such treatments are simplifications of a much more complex historical reality.

Found in the earliest strata of Buddhist texts, the Pāli canon, a magical view (distinct from the Egyptian-Hermetic-alchemical strains of the Western occult tradition) has its own long history (DeCaroli 2004). Magical powers follow from attaining certain meditative states. For example, in the 'Fruits of the Homeless Life' sutra the Buddha describes entry into the four absorptions (*jhāna*). The fourth is characterized as 'beyond pleasure and pain, and purified by equanimity and mindfulness' (Walshe 1987: 103). Having attained this condition of absorption, the Buddha says that the practitioner attains supernormal powers (*iddhividha-niddesa*). For example, the practitioner is able to direct 'his mind to the production of a mind-made body. He draws that body out of his body, having form, mind-made, complete with all its limbs and faculties' (ibid.: 104–5). The accomplished practitioner also knows the status of the minds of other people, whether deluded or undeluded, concentrated or unconcentrated, liberated or unliberated, and so on, as well as previous rebirths in detail. In this text the Buddha gives no indication that these abilities are an undesirable distraction. Buddhism did have a magical view that made it easily integrated into the occult view of the powers of the mind.

At the interface of Buddhism and occultism: D. T. Suzuki

One of the exemplary instances of the occultist formation of Buddhist modernism is D. T. Suzuki. Recent research has established the importance of occultism, particularly Swedenborgian, in Suzuki's personal history, as in William James's. Thomas Tweed has noted that although the New Jerusalem Church, established by Swedenborg's followers after his death, had relatively few active members, 'the Swedish mystic had a disproportionate cultural influence during the nineteenth century' (Tweed 2005: 253). This is consistent with the understanding that 'Swedenborg had come not to found a new denomination, but to announce that institutional religion had ended' (Richardson 2006: 107). Low levels of institutionalization are so characteristic of the occult subculture that Catherine Albanese notes, 'Historians of the metaphysical must take account of networks that appear especially temporary, self-erasing, self-transforming' (Albanese 2007: 8).

Suzuki described Swedenborg in terms used in Zen literature to describe ancient masters, claiming that Swedenborg had 'realized his true nature' (quoted in Hickey 2008b: 116). Suzuki equated several of Swedenborg's ideas with those of Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as the theory of macrocosmic–microcosmic correspondence with Nāgārjuna's assertion of the identity of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa (ibid.). Suzuki is, of course, a complex figure, but 'however problematic Suzuki's interpretations of Buddhism – and of Swedenborg – may be to contemporary scholars, for Westerners he was, and is, widely regarded as an expert, and extremely influential' (ibid.).

V. Commodifying Buddhism: Self-help and self-improvement

Consumerism has long structured the social forms of occultism, psychotherapy, and Buddhism. In her study of occultism in turn-of-the-century Germany, Corinna Treitel concludes that 'the German occult belonged to a larger culture of consumption. "Buy this and you will be wiser, healthier, and happier" was a standard message that appeared in innovative ways' (Treitel 2004: 75).

This is as true of Buddhism in contemporary Euro-American culture as of occultism in modernizing Germany. Also called 'harmonial religion' (Ahlstrom 1972: 1019–36), 'Lebensreform' promoted re-forming one's life to attain health and wholeness through 'reharmonizing humans' relation to nature through diet, clothing and medical reform' (Treitel 2004: 51), and is another characteristic of the occult subculture. Romantic pessimism about urbanization and industrialization of society during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century created nostalgia for the premodern and nature. In this view, 'industrial society created its own health problems and argued that these could be solved only by returning to nature' (ibid.: 155). German occult modern rejected the objectification of the patient in mainstream medicine, proposing instead 'the more personal, "natural," and healthful benefits of homeopathy, mesmerism, spirit healing, hydropathy, vegetarianism, therapeutic gymnastics, massage, nudism, and naturopathy' (ibid.).

The highly psychotherapeutic character of contemporary popular American religious culture is evident in both its mainstream and in its occult sidestreams. The importance of psychotherapy for mainstream popular religious culture is indicated by the continuing popularity of self-help publications combining psychotherapy and theology (Taylor 1999: 3), what Micki McGee calls 'therapeutic theism' (McGee 2005: 56). While the category of self-help is broad, including, for example, advice on how to use one's time efficiently, it is thick with 'psycho-theology,' providing a model for authors commodifying the modernist vision of Buddhism as psychotherapy. The psychotherapeutic character of the occult subculture is described by Eugene Taylor as a folk psychology:

> Such a psychology is characterized by its emphasis on multiple realities, by its view that personality is shaped by dynamic forces of the unconscious, and by its aim toward an understanding of extraordinary states of consciousness and expanded human potential. It is also known by its intense attraction to the natural environment and by its hint that there is some fundamental relationship between a return to nature and the recovery of basic values. It can be identified by its millennial vision of world peace. In its search for parity between science and spirituality, it reasons on the assumption that mental healing is an essential part of physical health and that there is healing in community. It promotes the paranormal as an integral part of human functioning, and it takes seriously

> accounts of spirit communication on the after-death plane, dream images, personal symbols of one's destiny, and religious visions. One can see from this that, above all, the most important element of this psychology is its emphasis on the possibility of the transcendent – that consciousness can be molded into something higher, purer, better.
>
> *(Taylor 1999: 15–16)*

Contemporary self-help culture draws on the cultural background of belief in the powers of the mind, mind-cure as part of the occult modern adaptation to modernity. The psychologized representation of Buddhism, with its own origins in interaction with the occult modern, can be readily adapted to the demands of the self-help marketplace.

As in the metaphor of 'spiritual growth,' open-ended self-improvement through consumption is basic to the self-help culture. Philip Cushman sees the decontextualized character of psychotherapy, which reinforces the decontextualized and dehistoricized vision of Buddhist modernism, as interlinked with consumerist society:

> Because psychotherapy denied the central influence of history and culture, symptoms reflecting the frame of reference of the modern Western world – such as loneliness and alienation, extreme competitiveness, and a desire for nonessential commodities – had to be considered natural and unavoidable. As a result, individuals have been constructed to strive tirelessly to consume and expand, and at the same time to believe that the search is simply an aspect of universal human nature.
>
> *(Cushman 1995: 157; see also Roof 1999: 209)*

Neo-romantic popular religious culture promotes a vision of individual personal wholeness. Like any other religious goal, it is predicated on comprehending the current human condition as pathological. This is a diagnostic prescriptive narrative – commodifying religion as a product needed to cure the pathology diagnosed by religion. Wholeness is an always receding goal, thus creating equally open-ended demand.

Decontextualizing Buddhist practice and teachings allows Buddhism to be more easily integrated into the self-help culture. This uniquely American world view believes in the power of experiential training, particularly a systematic division of tasks into discrete units. An example of this kind of structuring of the Buddhist teachings is found in Lama Willa Miller's *Everyday Dharma: Seven Weeks to Finding the Buddha in You* (Miller 2009). Such a structure promises to move the reader progressively through a series of stages to a desired end. In doing so, it creates a version of the teachings that structures them as a skill set, practical steps that one can take to improve one's life.

This work, like others presenting Buddhism as psychotherapeutic self-help, employs a Perennialist rhetoric. Perennialism promotes the notion that all religions ultimately derive from a single primeval source, that they all teach the same fundamental truths and aspire to the same goal. It informs much of contemporary popular religious culture, providing a rationale for eclecticism and a disregard for doctrinal differences. Miller says, for example:

> You do not have to subscribe to a belief system to benefit from the material in this book. In my own life, I have met Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Wiccans, Unitarians, and agnostics who use the tools of meditation and conventional wisdom offered in Buddhist sources. There is no corner on the market for becoming a better person or awakening authentic wisdom.
>
> *(Miller 2009: 5)*

Perennialism characterizes the occult modern, provides a way of adapting to the radically different religious cultures encountered in the age of empires. But Perennialism entails removing Buddhist teachings and practices from their cultural context. Harvey Aronson points out that 'most popular books on Buddhist practice are ahistorical. They assume that teachings from 2,500 years ago can simply be abstracted from their historical context and directly applied in the present' (Aronson 2004: 10). He goes on to demonstrate the practical consequences of ignoring cultural contexts, a concern shared by Jung.

Another of the themes found in popular Buddhist modernist works that evidences the intermingling with consumerist self-help culture is that of entitlement. Again, from Miller:

> My hope for you, as you go through Week One, is that you will begin to reclaim the excitement about life that is due you. Why is it due you? The process of creating a spiritual life is largely a process of discovering that you deserve to be happy. You deserve to live a fulfilling and meaningful life. You deserve to bring your innate wisdom-nature to its full blossoming.
>
> *(Miller 2009: 8–9)*

Such appeals to narcissism reflect wider psycho-social trends within Western culture. The fact that the cultures from which Buddhist thought originated were not psycho-socially configured around the narcissistic polarity of overvaluing and devaluing oneself as is contemporary Western society, creates many opportunities for misunderstandings.

The formative effect of broader culture on modernist representations of Buddhism as psychotherapeutic was not limited to the interactions with occult modern and

psychotherapy around the turn of the century. With the equation of Buddhism with silent, seated, individual meditation, ideas regarding the workings of the mind and that therefore relate to meditation affected the representation of Buddhism profoundly. One idea that has perhaps had the most formative role on how meditation is represented in the self-help literature is the concept of 'stress.' Although central in contemporary popular psychotherapeutic discourse, stress as a concept only enters that discourse at mid-twentieth century. In her study of the history of 'mind-body' medicine, Anne Harrington traces the relatively recent metaphoric appropriation of stress as a psychological term from the realm of engineering (Harrington 2008: 139–74; distinct from the medical definition of stress offered by Hans Selye in 1936). In the middle of the twentieth century Norman Vincent Peale told a story of an airline pilot who described his feelings in terms of mental fatigue, or stress. Aronson discusses how, coming to be culturally accepted, such narratives mold our understandings of ourselves, our place in the world, and our relation to others – they give an explanation for experiences that are otherwise out of the ordinary, an explanation that is understood by others around us. Being socially acceptable, such explanations are reinforced. 'As a modern Westerner, I tend to understand my experience in terms of my psychological or medical condition' (Aronson 2004: 98–9). He points out that other cultures have other ways of understanding, including that one has been cursed, or that one's humors (subtle physiological elements) are out of balance, or that unremembered past actions are now coming to fruition (ibid.: 98–112).

Prior to the middle of the twentieth century and the introduction of the idea of stress by the powerful self-help figure Norman Vincent Peale, stress was not one such socially reinforced explanatory narrative, and was not offered as a rationale for the practice of meditation. Stress is our social construct, our way of making sense of our experience. It has, however, now attained the status of a disease agent, and Buddhist modernism has adopted the diagnostic–prescriptive narrative of stress – which has no traditional Buddhist correlate – as one of the rationales for meditation, and for the purchase of self-help books about meditation (for example Flickstein 2009: 19–23).

At the interface of Buddhism and self-help: the Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso, fourteenth incarnation, 1935–) is the most visible Buddhist on the global mediascape. Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (1989), he is not only the leader of the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism, but until recently also head of the Tibetan government in exile (the Central Tibetan Administration). He has been very active in promoting Tibetan Buddhism in the West, including the creation of the Mind and Life Institute (http://www.mindandlife.org/) which brings together researchers in contemporary sciences for conferences and research on a variety of topics, including consciousness studies and the neuroscientific studies of meditation.

These efforts have included attempts to promote compassion as a non-sectarian spiritual practice, such as a series of published conversations with Howard C. Cutler, whose voice as both interlocutor and editor dominates the published texts (Dalai Lama and Cutler 1998, 2003, 2009). Thus, questions are posed from a contemporary Western perspective – important because the ability to pose the question, not to mention edit the answers, determines the answers given. The opening chapter of the first of the three publications to date is called 'The Right to Happiness,' evidencing the theme of entitlement common to contemporary self-help literature (Dalai Lama and Cutler 1998: 13). In addition, these works reveal the instrumental attitude of much of the self-help literature. We find Buddhism reduced to a set of tools or techniques by which one can attain happiness, tools whose value is judged by how well they help one to be socially adapted – accepting the standards and values of one's society and operating successfully within those standards and values.

Conclusion

The modernist representation of Buddhism as psychotherapy – healing of and by the mind – is an image of Buddhism as reflected in the mirror of contemporary religio-cultural concerns. Just as Schopenhauer saw in Buddhism a teaching of stoically accepting the realities of suffering and limitations, so now Buddhism is reflected against the desire for happiness and our expectation of achieving that happiness through the powers of the mind (see also Wallace 2005, Larkin 2007). In order to consider the possibility that Buddhism is something other than a set of tools and techniques that we can put to use reducing stress and creating happiness, we must step back and discern the distorting qualities of the mirror, and the limitations created by its frame.

What is being reflected back to us by the highly accentuated linking of Buddhism and psychotherapy is a set of very deeply entrenched understandings of personal development and human existence that structure popular Western religious culture and, therefore, its representation of Buddhism. Often left out of discussions of the relation between Buddhism and psychotherapy is the important third term of the creative relation, occultism. It was largely through its occultist interpreters, whether Theosophical, New Thought, Swedenborgian, or Rosicrucian, that awareness of Buddhism entered into Western popular religious culture. Modern forms of occultism were themselves highly prone to psychotherapeutic interpretations based on a common belief in the power of the mind to affect all things. That Buddhism today is widely presumed to be psychotherapeutic is a consequence of the deeply intertwined history of occultism, psychotherapy, and Buddhism as they developed in the period roughly between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the First World War. In this period nostalgia for the missing war dead fueled spiritualism, while the expansion

of empire opened up Buddhist cultures – China, Japan, Vietnam, Tibet, Thailand, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka – to Euro-American eyes. Occult modern, psychotherapy, and early Buddhist modernism – all in interaction with one another – offered the individual ways of adapting to the dramatic changes in social organization and cultural horizons that marked this period. Modernist representations of Buddhism were psychotherapeutic from the very beginning.

Summary

- One of the predominant representations of Buddhism in contemporary popular religious culture is that it is a kind of psychotherapy, that is, literally, a way to heal the mind by mental means.
- This particular understanding of Buddhism, however, is one specific interpretation based both on the interests and expectations of contemporary Western consumers, and on the selection of particular aspects of the tradition as representing the entirety of the tradition. The psychotherapeutic interpretation of Buddhism is, therefore, overdetermined, explaining both its appearance as ‘natural,’ and its intractability.
- The image of Buddhism as psychotherapy was not, however, created by the simple imposition of a particular interpretation onto some uninterpreted Buddhism, some pure or essential Buddhism that might be recovered by removing the interpretation. It was rather that from around the middle of the second half of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth, Buddhism, professional psychotherapy, and a modernized esotericism all emerged as cultural phenomena in interaction with one another.

Discussion points

- What particular themes did occultism introduce to Buddhism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?
- Is it possible to escape the ‘distorting mirror’ of one’s own culture in the understanding of Buddhism? How might one encounter Buddhism more on its own terms, rather than those set by popular culture?
- Evaluate the author’s critical position on interpreting Buddhism as a kind of psychology.

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13 Buddhism and Gender

Liz Wilson

Feminism, scholarship, and activism

First wave feminism

Some of the first scholars of Buddhism were nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century British scholars who brought to the study of Buddhism a range of concerns typical of Buddhist modernism in its formative years. As Philip Almond, David McMahan and others have shown, mastery over texts was crucial to the formulation of disciplinary standards for early Buddhist studies in the West. T. W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922), who founded the Pāli Text Society, C. A. F. Rhys Davids (1857–1942), B. C. Law (1862–1969), I. B. Horner (1896–1981), and other early Western scholars of Buddhism were textual scholars who gave pride of place to the primary sources that they collected and mastered. The Buddhism thus constituted as an object of study was almost entirely textual, and based on a select corpus of texts at that. Cosmological texts that assume the reality of various spirit beings, deities, and demons, and ritual texts that provide means of controlled interaction with such beings, did not garner the same attention as texts dedicated to ethical matters and the cultivation of inner states of mind in meditation. As Charles Hallisey points out with regard to T. W. Rhys Davids, this imbalance in the kinds of texts prioritized can be traced in some cases to indigenous priorities and to the kinds of texts that Theravāda Buddhist collaborators shared with Western Buddhist scholars (Hallisey 1995: 47). In any case, the prioritizing of certain texts along with the nineteenth-century mystique of origins made it possible for many early scholars of Buddhism to idealize the Buddha as a figure whose teachings emphasized instrumental rationality, individualism, gender egalitarianism, and other Western Enlightenment values.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, scholars published a number of significant works focusing on Buddhist women. C. A. F. Rhys Davids's and K. R. Norman's English translation of the Pāli *Therīgāthā* (published under the title *Poems of Early Buddhist Nuns* (*Therigatha*) was released in 1909, giving the English-speaking world access to a canonical Pāli text that preserves verses attributed to accomplished early nuns (as well as abridged versions of the nuns' biographies drawn from commentarial texts). B. C. Law published a monograph on women in Pāli literature in 1927. His *Women in Buddhist Literature* is the first systematic scholarly investigation of Pāli texts for historical evidence on the status of women in early Buddhism. In 1930, I. B. Horner published *Women in Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen*. Like Law's monograph, Horner's work engages a wide range of Pāli texts for evidence that those texts might yield on the status of women in early Buddhism, including both nuns and laywomen.

For C. A. F. Rhys Davids, B. C. Law, and I. B. Horner, Buddhist gender equity meant the emergence of new opportunities for women, especially the opportunity for women to lead renunciant lives as nuns. All three describe the ordained nun as a being

for whom female social roles are no longer significant, an asexual being for whom female sexual characteristics are not a source of identity. According to C. A. F. Rhys Davids, the nun 'laid down all social prestige, all domestic success, as a mother, wife, daughter, queen, or housekeeper, and gained the austerer joys of an asexual rational being, walking with wise men in recognized intellectual equality on higher levels of thought ...' (quoted in Walters 1994: 359, Collett 2006: 72). B. C. Law uses similar language to describe the accomplished women to whom the verses of the Therigatha are attributed: these women 'broke through the fetters of worldly life and gained the joys of asexual rational beings ...' (Law 1927: 61).

These scholars tended to champion Buddhist egalitarianism by treating Hinduism as a foil. It was a common Orientalist trope for Western advocates of Buddhism to exalt Buddhism by emphasizing the differences between Buddhist social practices and those of Brahmanical Hinduism, stereotyped as caste-bound, ritualistic, superstitious, and patriarchal (Hallisey 1995: 46, Inden 1990: 85–130). The common assumption of much Victorian popular writing on Buddhism was that the Buddha was a social reformer invested in individual rights; his teachings freed those oppressed by gender and caste hierarchies (Almond 1988: 69–79). I. B. Horner's early work assumes the image of Buddha as reformer whose teachings emancipated women from the tyranny of patriarchy. Thus Horner begins the section of her *Women in Primitive Buddhism* that is dedicated to laywomen with this statement: 'In pre-Buddhist days the status of women in India was on the whole low and without honour' (Horner 1930: 1). The rise of Buddhism, she goes on to indicate, changed the rules of the game:

> During the Buddhist epoch there was a change. Women came to enjoy more equality, and greater respect and authority that ever hitherto accorded them. Although their activities were confined within certain spheres – principally the domestic, social, and religious – their position in general began to improve. The exclusive supremacy of man began to give way before the increasing emancipation of woman.... Under Buddhism, more than ever before, she was an individual in command of her own life until the dissolution of her body, and less of a chattel to be only respected if she lived through and on a man.
>
> *(Horner 1930: 2)*

Individual rights and individual autonomy being the hallmarks of modernist discourse on human dignity, we see in Horner's words a clear rendering of the Buddha's virtues in the idiom of modernity. Much later in I. B. Horner's long and productive career, it is worth noting, this scholar showed less interest in using Hinduism as a foil to make a case for Buddhist gender egalitarianism. In a talk that Horner gave to the All-Ceylon Buddhist Women's Association (Horner 1982), she took pains to point out the

tendency of scholars to exaggerate the plight of women prior to the rise of Buddhism, reminding her audience that women figure as significant teachers in the Upanishads.

Horner explicitly linked the agenda of the Buddha as an advocate of individual rights to first-wave feminism in her comments on the founding of the order of nuns. She attributes the Buddha's hesitation about admitting women into the renunciant life as a temporary hesitation that went against his core Enlightenment values:

> The tradition of the past strove against the fairness and justice and common sense as he saw them given in the present, all demanding to effect the reform, called in later days and in different climes 'The Emancipation of Woman'.... Doubtless Gotama was more than half-consciously aware of the possibility of a coming struggle between the sexes, and more than half-consciously foreshadowed a sympathy for the woman which ranks as one of his greatest claims to fame as a benefactor of the human race.
>
> *(Horner 1930: 110)*

Second-wave feminism

Americans who came of age in the 1960s and early 1970s will recall vivid mass media images of the beginnings of second-wave feminism, such as women burning their bras and carrying signs declaring the end of sexism. Where nineteenth-century first-wave feminists focused on such officially mandated inequalities as property rights and the right to vote, twentieth-century second-wave feminists addressed a range of social practices that bear on women's ability to exercise agency and self-fulfillment. Second-wave feminists focused on such issues as the control of sexuality and reproductive decisions, household divisions of labor, and how cultural representations of women can govern many aspects of women's domestic and private lives. Western Buddhist practitioners growing up during the heyday of second-wave feminism brought such concerns to their Dharma centers, drawing attention to various forms of exclusionary practices in Buddhist communities. For example, questions were raised about whether some liturgies might have the effect of implicitly gendering the advanced practitioner as male. Feminist activists noted that a Dharma center could be open to women practitioners and could even have a majority of women leaders governing the community but still send exclusionary messages through the importance given to such practices as chanting the names of men in all-male lineages.

Since the late 1960s, women teachers have made influential contributions as deliberate innovators of Buddhist practices in a variety of Dharma centers. But the impact of women teachers has been especially transformative in US Buddhist convert communities, where women have played decisive roles as practitioners,

community leaders, intellectuals, and social activists (Seager 1999: 185–200). A rich record of sources describes these contributions. Sandy Boucher interviewed 85 American Buddhist women for her study, *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism.* Lenore Friedman interviewed 17 women Buddhist teachers for her work, *Meetings with Remarkable Women: Buddhist Teachers in America*. Marianne Dresser edited essays by 30 Western Buddhist women in her 1996 anthology *Buddhist Women on the Edge: Contemporary Perspectives from the Western Frontier*. Contributors to *Buddhist Women on the Edge* include influential academics who are also teachers of Buddhism, such as Jan Willis, Judith Simmer-Brown, bell hooks, Rita Gross, Anne Klein, and Miranda Shaw. Many women teachers leading American convert communities in the decades since the 1960s have engaged in consciously rethinking hierarchy, stressing horizontal over vertical forms of leadership in their communities. This process was partly fueled by controversy in North American and European Buddhist communities over scandals involving high-ranked male Buddhist teachers committing sexual improprieties with students. The controversies raised by these scandals led to useful dialogue in the convert Buddhist community about hierarchy, authority, and power.

It might be assumed that questions of hierarchy, power differentials, and gender inequity have not been of concern to immigrant Buddhists in the West. But as Mrozik suggests, transplanting Asian Buddhist forms in non-Asian contexts offers immigrant Buddhists the chance to be deliberate about the kinds of Buddhist institution they wish to create (Gregory and Mrozik 2008: 12). Indeed, many immigrants have transplanted forms of Buddhism already consciously reshaped by modernization movements in Asia; adapting those modernized forms to Western intellectual and social landscapes has involved additional levels of rethinking and deliberation with regard to gender.

Nevertheless, discourses about the ways that Buddhism is gendered that have emerged largely from the convert community have not always been attentive to the forms of Buddhist practice most congenial to Asian American women, the majority of whom identify as laywomen. Based on two years of fieldwork done in a Korean American Buddhist community in Los Angeles (Suh 2004), scholar Sharon Suh observes, ‘Western Buddhist feminists often overlook laywomen’s devotional practices,’ characterizing such practices as ‘popular religion’ (Gregory and Mrozik 2008: 154). In privileging meditative practices as essential to what it means to be Buddhist, convert-based reflections about Buddhist women’s experiences often lead readers to the conclusion that the ritually-based devotional practices of many Asian and Asian American Buddhist women are not authentic expressions of Buddhist commitments. Assumptions that exclude ritual from what is considered authentic Buddhism go far towards explaining why devotional forms of practice are overlooked or devalued in modern formations of Buddhism that prioritize meditation as the *sine qua non* of Buddhism (Sharf 1995).

New directions: third-wave feminism, men and masculinities, queer theory

As the example of Korean American Buddhist women who identify as lay practitioners suggests, the gendered experience of a female Buddhist practitioner depends on much else besides her inclusion in the category of 'female' or 'woman.' Ethnicity, nationality, social class, age, sectarian affiliation, sexual orientation, and a whole host of other factors play into the formation of a gendered identity. Debates within feminist theory in the 1980s lead to questions about who is left out in assumptions about the 'woman' who is purportedly the object of feminist theory and activism. Postcolonial theorists, women of color, and queer theorists offered trenchant criticisms of the homogeneity of the category 'woman' and offered examples of exclusion to show that not all women's experiences are captured by monolithic models. In addition, the category of 'female' or 'woman' came under interrogation by deconstructionist and poststructuralist theorists questioning the universality of all identity categories. What for many feminists of the first and second waves was a unified object of inquiry no longer offered analytical precision. Third-wave feminist theory, while it may be too soon to characterize it precisely, focuses on the historically contingent, multiple, and mutable nature of women's gendered experiences.

New directions of inquiry have also been opened by the shift from 'women' to 'gender' as a category of investigation and the recognition that men as well as women perform gender and experience the effects of defined gender roles. John Powers's 2009 monograph *A Bull of a Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism* is the first book-length contribution to the study of men and masculinities in Buddhism. Powers observes that the vast majority of Indian Buddhist literature is written by and for men and therefore warrants scholarly investigation for models of normative masculinity that might be found there, as well as in the art historical record. His monograph counters the widespread modern scholarly and popular image of the Buddha as an androgynous, asexual being by drawing attention to the ways that the Buddha has been endowed with ultramasculine attributes associated with ancient Indian warrior ideals. Further work in the field might be expected to uncover other varieties of masculinity discourses, including subordinated and marginalized masculine formations.

Since gender is a complex category that is not exhausted by the polarities of 'male' and 'female,' gender identities cannot be adequately represented by such monolithic categories. Janet Gyatso (2003) provides the basis for theorizing in creative and non-dualistic ways about how gender has operated as a category in Buddhist discourses. She examines the place of what in contemporary parlance would be called intersexed and nonsexed people in the *vinaya* and in Tibetan medical literature. Gyatso finds examples of positive value being placed on indeterminacy of gender in Tibetan medical literature and also in the case of a Tibetan Buddhist deity who is said to perform the work of the Buddhas precisely because of gender indeterminacy. Gyatso

also considers the exclusion of intersexed people in *vinaya* accounts of who is eligible for ordination in the *saṅgha*. She speculates on links between the status of women in the *vinaya* as the derivative gender or second sex and the status of intersexed or third-sex people in *vinaya* literature, suggesting that perhaps it was the exclusion of the people of indeterminate gender that allowed for the inclusion of women in the order. Gyatso's work, along with contributions by Cabezon, Zwilling, Sweet, Childs, Schalow, Corless, Hinsch, and others, lays a basis for the emergence of queer theory as a robust line of inquiry for scholars of Buddhist studies and practitioners of Buddhism.

Women, modernity, and authority

As suggested above, there is much that we miss when limiting ourselves to the category of 'women' as a way of exploring Buddhist history and the possibilities that Buddhism offers practitioners. Nevertheless, for much of the modern period, the status of Buddhist women has been the focus of scholarship in Buddhist studies and activism within Buddhist circles. This section explores some of the changes in roles and status that modern Buddhist discourses have forged for women practitioners and considers disputes over authority and legitimacy that these changes have entailed.

Opportunities for women to live as nuns in premodern times were not available in all parts of Buddhist Asia, but this did not prevent Buddhist women from controlling significant material resources and social capital. Literary, art historical, archeological, ethnographic, and epigraphic records leave no doubt that lay women exercised considerable authority in various premodern Asian Buddhist cultural settings. For example, in Vajrayāna contexts, women played (and continue to play) important religious roles as mothers, wives, and daughters in hereditary lineages of religious teachers. As Havnevik suggests (1989: 127–8), it is helpful to distinguish between formal and informal status designations when exploring the kinds of authority that Buddhist women have exercised. Premodern women who in their roles as wives and daughters served as administrators of large estates, controlled resources, and exercised forms of power were not always recognized with formal status designations. Nevertheless, such women operated as cultural power brokers through their control of resources. Buddhist women who offered services as ritual specialists (spirit-mediums, healers, and the like) exercised considerable authority. In some cases, female premodern ritual specialists may have exercised more power and influence in their communities than did many titled monks whose authority came from membership in the *saṅgha*.

Modernizing Buddhists committed to gender equity have sought to formalize some of the more informal roles that premodern Buddhist women have historically played. One method for formalizing the authority that women wield is to increase parity between men and women in monastic life through increasing the number and

influence of fully ordained women in the *saṅgha*. International movements to revive full ordination for women in all Buddhist sects have offered modern Buddhist women new opportunities for full-time religious practice, participation in formal institutions, and leadership in their communities. But these new opportunities for women have emerged in the midst of much debate about the authority and legitimacy of new modalities of female renunciation.

Changing fortunes of the nuns' order

Throughout Buddhist Asia, women have behaved as renunciants, practicing full-time religious vocations by taking additional precepts beyond the five core Buddhist precepts. Women have dressed as renunciants and behaved as nuns in many Asian cultural contexts where neither novice ordination nor full ordination as a Buddhist nun has been available for them. Because the institutionalized order of nuns has not survived uniformly in Asian settings, many Buddhist women have practiced renunciation in liminal modes that hybridize lay and monastic forms of practice. The English term 'precept nuns' is a useful designation for these renunciant women, who may or may not have access to novice and higher ordination procedures.

The lineage of full nuns' ordination was evidently never transmitted in Tibet and countries where Vajrayāna is the dominant form of Buddhist practice. Nevertheless, renunciant women have taken robes through the process of novice ordination in these places. Full nuns' ordination appears to have lapsed in Sri Lanka in the eleventh century and in Burma in the thirteenth century (Kawanami 2007: 229). The lineage of full nuns' ordination survived only in China and East Asia; full bhikṣunī ordination lineages operate today in places like Korea and Taiwan.

Modern scholars such as Nancy Falk have linked the demise of full nuns' ordination in Asia to the structural superiority of monks over nuns that is established in *vinaya* accounts of the founding of the nuns' order at the request of the Buddha's aunt/step-mother, Gotamī. The Buddha is represented in *vinaya* accounts as clearly affirming that women were capable of attaining nirvana, but at the same time hesitant to allow women to join the *saṅgha* as nuns. According to *vinaya* accounts, the Buddha accedes to Gotamī's request reluctantly, allowing women to enter the *saṅgha* only on the condition that women accept eight additional rules that make the nuns' order administratively subordinate to the monks' order. Falk suggests that this subordinated position meant that the nuns' order would never enjoy the same level of respect and material support that the monks' order would enjoy, and thus the decline of the nuns' order was inevitable. The *vinaya* passages that impose these additional rules have been much studied, and many questions about how to interpret them remain (Gyatso 2003: 91). But however we account for it, the historical reality is that in many parts of Asia, the institutional basis for the continuity of the nuns' orders has not survived. And

even in East Asia, where ordination lineages remain, the institutional vitality of nuns' organizations has been relatively weak until modern monastic revival movements brought new recognition and new opportunities for women.

A major issue for modernizing Buddhists attempting to strengthen the position of women in the *saṅgha* is how to achieve legitimate authority for women as nuns while negotiating the demands of orthodox interpretations of monastic legitimacy. Twentieth-century attempts to revive the *bhikkhunī* order in Theravāda contexts have been marked by controversy, as will be shown below. In order to understand what is at stake, we must first examine the creation of new roles for renunciant Theravāda women in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka, where Asian Buddhist modernizers and their Western supporters were key figures in the revival of Buddhism and the construction of modern Theravāda forms of practice.

Women renouncers in modern Sri Lanka

Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864–1933), a Sri Lankan Buddhist reformer who had a passing association with the Theosophical Society, played a central role in the nineteenth-century revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Gananath Obeyesekere (1991: 227) describes how Dharmapāla formalized interstitial roles for men and women that were neither fully lay nor fully monastic. Dharmapāla himself occupied such an interstitial role: he did not seek formal ordination as a *bhikkhu*, but he practiced celibacy, the hallmark of the *bhikkhu*, from an early age. In this way, Dharmapāla advocated and exemplified in his lifestyle the kind of this-worldly ascetic lifestyle that he wanted to see Sri Lankan Buddhist laypeople adopt to counter the influence of British colonialism and Christian missions on the island. Together with other Sri Lankans and Western collaborators, Dharmapāla established the renunciant role for women known today as the *dasa sil mātā* or 'Ten Precept Mother.' These monastic precept 'mothers' occupy an interstitial role that bridges lay and monastic spheres. They are mothers (*mātā*) of the ten precepts (*dasa sil*) that constitute the training rules for novice Theravāda monks as well as rules that are followed by laity on the island on certain *uposatha* days. 'Ten Precept Mothers' follow precepts that include chastity and restraint in diet as well as other forms of abstention from self-indulgence.

To counter the influence of Christian missionary schools and British imperial rule on the island, Dharmapāla called on Sri Lankans to educate their children in a modernizing Buddhist fashion, an appeal that was enthusiastically embraced by educated, urban Sinhalese elites. For educating women, the revival of female religious institutions promised an ideal way to maintain gender segregation while offering educational opportunities as expansive as those offered by Western institutions. In this way, the revival of the nuns' order went hand in hand with efforts to revive Buddhism as the national culture of Sri Lanka. Educated, urban Sri Lankans gave enthusiastic support to

efforts to establish residential communities and schools for women. After Sri Lankan independence, however, the urban elite that had provided such high levels of funding for renunciant women became less active in support of the cause. Tessa Bartholomeusz, who interviewed Sinhalese *dasa sil mātā*s in the 1980s, describes the status of Sri Lankan precept nuns as considerably lower than that of their nineteenth-century counterparts. The precept nuns in her sample tended to be poor, less educated, and to enjoy less support from the laity than the renunciant women who lived in the preceding century.

For modernizers like Dharmapāla, who was openly contemptuous of the monastic establishment on the island and did not recognize the legitimacy of the traditional forms of authority the *saṅgha* in his day represented, the interstitial role of a *dasa sil mātā* was a meaningful expression of a woman's Buddhist commitments. But for many modernizing Buddhists today, the liminal status of the precept nuns such as the *dasa sil mātā*s is not acceptable. Many hold the belief that official recognition as a *bhikkhunī* is needed for a precept nun to realize her religious aspirations.

Efforts to revive the Theravāda nuns' order

One of the hallmarks of modern Buddhism is the creation of new roles vested with authority that comes from renegotiating and revising traditional forms. Efforts to revive the Theravāda women's monastic order raise issues of authority for modern and traditional Buddhists alike. There is no consensus on the matter, even among Buddhist modernists who promote women's rights.

In 1996 in Sarnath, India, Sri Lankan monks from the Mahabodhi Society along with East Asian monks and nuns gave higher ordination to the ten Sri Lankan *dasa sil mātā*s. Organizers of the event argued that it was permissible for East Asian monastics to give higher ordination to nuns seeking full ordination in a Theravāda monastic lineage because it was originally Sri Lankan monastics who first ordained Chinese women as nuns in the fifth century CE. And, the argument goes, East Asian women were ordained by rules set forth in a monastic code that does not neatly differentiate Mahāyāna from other sectarian forms of Buddhism. That is to say that while Mahāyāna Buddhists in East Asia developed distinctive doctrinal positions, most (with the exception of Japanese Buddhists) continued the monastic ordination lineages of older Indian Buddhist schools. The Sri Lankan nuns ordained in 1996 did, however, wear Korean style robes and took the *bodhisattva* vow, a ritual sequence that is not a feature of higher ordination in Theravāda monastic lineages. A second round of ordinations was organized by a modernizing Taiwanese organization with humanistic aims a year and half later in Bodhgaya, India. This higher ordination ceremony was attended by Taiwanese nuns and monks affiliated with both Mahāyāna and Theravāda ordination lineages.

Many Sri Lankan monks did not regard either of these ordination procedures as fully legitimate. Those monks who wished to see the revival of the *bhikkhunī saṅgha*



Figure 13.1 Dhammananda Bhikkhunī (center), with Brooke Schedneck (right) and Eva Pascal (left). She received bhikkhunī ordination in Sri Lanka in 2003, making her the first Thai woman to receive full ordination as a Theravāda nun

occur under the auspices of more traditionally recognized ordination procedures re-conferred female monastic ordination in Sri Lanka according to Theravāda ordination procedures. A number of ecumenical and international organizations have been involved in the movement to revive the *bhikkhunī saṅgha* in Sri Lanka, and one of the most visible organizations in the movement is Sakyadhita International, a network of international Buddhist women that provides a forum for activism and scholarship on issues pertaining to Buddhist women. Through the efforts of a variety of international and ecumenical Buddhist bodies, over 500 women have been given *bhikkhunī* ordination on the island since 1998.

The *saṅgha* in Sri Lanka has been deeply divided over the issue. Prominent monks leading the movement to revive *bhikkhunī* ordination in that country have various reformist agendas that those who endorse enhanced recognition for renunciant women may or may not support. Kawanami (2007) surveys a range of twentieth-century movements to revive *bhikkhunī* ordination in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma

and summarizes debates in Burma on the wisdom of reviving the *bhikkhunī saṅgha*. His analysis highlights the ways in which the reformist and ecumenical agendas of some in the movement to revive the nuns' order have been perceived as undermining the integrity of Buddhist institutions and have created rifts between unordained and ordained women as well as those who support each. What is clear in Kawanami's narration is that the process of negotiating new forms of authority in the nuns' revival movement is not easy and not without conflict: 'In many ways, the movement has opened a can of worms, since it allows every participant to try to negotiate their boundaries and establish a new realm of authority in the Buddhist world' (Kawanami 2007: 241–2).

Not all Theravāda precept nuns are in favor of reviving the lineage of Theravāda nuns. Some renunciant women see the revival as procedurally impossible: once the line of *bhikkhunī*s has stopped, there is no legitimate way to revive that lineage. Some have no desire to establish a new formal status, on the grounds that it would hold no real authority in their own particular sectarian traditions. Others worry that such moves would be regarded as a challenge to traditional authority, and they prefer to work within local structures, enhancing the informal status they already have. Others still (Bartholemeusz 1994) oppose the revival of a formal *bhikkhunī saṅgha* because this would place them more fully under the authority of monks. For this latter group of women, the modernist goal of autonomy does not sit well with the formal status of a fully ordained *bhikkhunī* since the *bhikkhu saṅgha* in theory oversees the *bhikkhunī saṅgha* in certain matters. Clearly, renunciant Theravāda women have various viewpoints on the matter, and varying ways in which they negotiate the demands of traditional and modern modes of authority. Likewise, although there are many supporters within the Theravāda establishment on the island, no consensus has yet emerged to accept the ordinations of the *dasa sil mātās* as valid.

The movement to revive the *bhikkhunī saṅgha* showcases many of the fault lines in modern Buddhism, especially points of contestation and negotiation between localized/sectarian and globalized/ecumenical visions of the Dharma. One of the central issues that have emerged out of efforts to reinvent ordination traditions that have lapsed by working with ecumenical bodies and global organizations like Sakyadhita International, is the question of whether there can or should be an international *saṅgha* that has authority to speak on matters of monastic discipline. Such a body would likely prove decisive for the revival of full ordination for nuns in all Buddhist traditions. But no such international *saṅgha* exists. Historically, Buddhist sectarian traditions have not sought consensus on what constitutes proper monastic discipline. While premodern Buddhists created strong transnational networks connecting distant parts of Asia and established many centers of Buddhist culture that drew Buddhists from all over Asia (such as the monastic universities of India described by Chinese pilgrims), nothing comparable to today's global Buddhist forums

and organizations has existed in Buddhism's history. The new forms of dialogue and new organizations that are currently emerging around the issue of reviving the nuns' order across all Buddhist sectarian traditions promise to have a decisive effect on the future of Buddhism.

New forms of Buddhist practice and organizational life are being shaped by those engaging various modern questions about gender. Questions about what it means and has meant historically for Buddhists to identify as male, female, transgendered, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer have led to innovative ways of rethinking gender hierarchies in Dharma practice and Buddhist institutions. Attempts to formalize roles for renunciant women in Asia and revive the nuns' order where lapsed, the unprecedented way that women are now shaping the practice of Buddhism as teachers and leaders in Dharma centers outside Asia, and the emergence of discourses on masculinity and queer identity among Buddhist practitioners and scholars of Buddhism, will all contribute to new formations of modern Buddhism. Innovations that emerge may or may not go unchallenged. What is clear is that gender continues to be an influential lens for thinking about what it means to be a Buddhist and that this lens will shape the forms that Buddhism takes in the future.

Summary

- First-wave feminist scholarship on gender in Buddhism tended to depict the Buddha as a social reformer who advocated individual rights and gender egalitarianism.
- Feminism's second wave, beginning in the 1960s, led to the emergence of many women teachers and innovative techniques for enhancing gender equity in Dharma centers, especially among convert communities in America.
- New ways of thinking about gender in Buddhism have emerged from third-wave feminism and scholarship on masculinity studies, as well as the work of queer theorists and LGBTQ activists.
- Modern Buddhists have sought to formalize women's authority in various ways, including the creation of new roles for renunciant women.
- The changing fortunes of the Buddhist nuns' order provides a background for understanding contemporary efforts by modern Buddhists to facilitate full ordination for women as nuns in every Buddhist tradition.

Discussion points

- What modernist assumptions governed early scholarship on gender in Buddhism?
- Why has the category of 'gender' been found to be more useful than the category of 'women' as a means of exploring Buddhist history?
- What kinds of authority have Buddhist women exercised in premodern contexts?

- How do new leadership roles played by many modern Buddhist women challenge traditional authority structures? In what ways do these new roles reinvent traditional modes of authority and legitimacy?
- Why is monastic ordination important to many modern Buddhist women as a means of religious self-actualization?
- What conflicts have arisen for various Buddhist stakeholders from efforts to revive the Theravāda nuns' order?

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14 Buddhism and Science: Translating and Re-translating Culture

Francisca Cho

Can Buddhism and science be compared?

In *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Donald Lopez notes that in the course of the Western interest in Buddhism, different versions of Buddhism have been compared to different versions of science, each comparison emphasizing their similarities (Lopez 2008: 31–2). In the late nineteenth century, the interest was in the Buddhist idea of causality and its compatibility with the mechanistic world view of science. After the Second World War, interest shifted to Buddhist emptiness philosophy and Einsteinian relativity. Currently, the attention is on Buddhism and cognitive science, particularly the use of brain imaging to measure the effects of Buddhist meditation. In each of these episodes we have heard that Buddhism is like science or that science confirms Buddhism. In this, Lopez sees a play of interests that have little to do with Buddhism or science themselves. How else could it be that the outcome is always the same – that is, Buddhism and science agree with each other – despite their many different versions?

It is a natural tendency of the human mind to alight upon surface similarities between unrelated entities. In approaching a new and unfamiliar entity, the mind can only do so analogically, by first picking out what seems recognizable and already known to us. As Jonathan Z. Smith states in his reflections on comparative studies, most comparisons are not homologous, in the sense of picking out two genetically or historically related entities. The similarities between the objects we compare are instead a creation of *the observer's own mind and thought* (Smith 1982). The interesting question, then, is *what* is compared and why. Buddhist traditions, particularly the Japanese Zen and Tibetan Tantric varieties, have been the object of much Western interest and imagination since the late nineteenth century. As a non-theistic religion, Buddhism has been promoted as a scientifically palatable religion that bypasses the intractable arguments between monotheism, which affirms a creator God, and a purely naturalistic science. This view of Buddhism has been quite expedient during a period of increasing tensions between Christianity and Darwinian theory. Furthermore, the active role that the present Dalai Lama of Tibet, Tenzin Gyatso, has taken in advancing conversations between Buddhism and Western science creates social prestige for Tibetan Buddhist culture, which faces the real danger of extinction as a result of Chinese colonial aggression.

In the face of this apparent win-win encounter, Western scholars of Buddhism nevertheless raise legitimate questions about what this love affair may ultimately cost, particularly for the Buddhists. To what degree must Buddhists alter and even maim their own traditions in order to fulfill the demands of Western expectations? Lopez describes the 'Buddhism' at the heart of this engagement as the product of Pāli and Sanskrit texts that:

> were extracted from the colony and shipped to Europe, where they were refined to produce a new Buddha, one that had not existed before ... [and] then exported back to Asia, where he was sold to Asian Buddhists at a high price.
>
> *(Lopez 2008: 10)*

The price paid by Asians to embrace this Westernized Buddha, Lopez avers, is the full historical reality of Buddhist practice – with its riches of mythology, ritual, and decidedly unscientific, supernatural claims – which are now sanitized in order to be palatable to the secular West.

The meeting of different cultures can certainly be a fractious process, but the history of Buddhism suggests a consistent skillfulness on this score. Forging a presence all throughout Asia, Buddhism has taken substantial root in non-native soil in spite of competition and even hostility from indigenous traditions, whether local varieties of spirit worship or highly learned and textual traditions such as Confucianism and Islam. Not only has Buddhism maintained its institutional autonomy throughout these encounters, it has also interbred with native religious and philosophical strains to produce vibrant hybrids that now form indelible chapters in Buddhist history – such as East Asian Chan/Zen Buddhism. The encounter between Buddhism and modern Western science can certainly be framed as a contest over who has the power to define the other for its own expedient ends. But it can also be seen as another historical space with potential for the kind of marriage that has kept Buddhism alive throughout its history. In his own consideration of Buddhism and modern science, David McMahan states that the two can *become* substantially compatible when they are taken up in relation to each other. He notes, 'This "taking up" of selected elements of a tradition in the context of another tradition is how religions develop, adapt, change, and come to occupy different ideological niches from the ones they evolved in' (McMahan 2008: 116).

In this essay, I consider the evidence for such a possibility by noting two aspects of this encounter, particularly as formulated in the current scientific investigation and application of Buddhist meditation to Western therapeutic contexts. The first aspect is what I call 'cultural translation,' which is to be distinguished from textual and doctrinal understanding. The translation of new ideas inevitably necessitates what the Chinese used to call concept-matching (*geyi*) when they used native Daoist terms to translate Buddhist ones. We can only begin such translations by distorting the new ideas with our native terminology. Hence in China, Buddhist '*prajna*,' or wisdom, was translated as '*dao*,' or the Way; Buddhist '*shunyata*,' or emptiness, became '*wu*,' or nothingness; and Buddhist nirvana was rendered as '*wuwei*,' or effortless action. As Whalen Lai notes about concept matching, simply pairing terms from two different traditions problematically assumes a structural parallelism when, in fact, 'there might not be, in the recipient culture, idea complexes comparable to the alien system being

introduced' (Lai 1979: 239). The result is that conceptual translations can confuse rather than enlighten us about new traditions.

This is clearly at issue in Western therapeutic appropriations of Buddhist meditation practice. One ready example is the degree to which current Western psychological and educational discourses are steeped in the concept of 'self-esteem' as a norm of healthy personal development. If Buddhist meditation is implemented and tested for its ability to enhance therapeutic goals, as they are formulated in our contemporary culture, what do we do about the fact that traditional Buddhist practice is directed toward realizing a complex of ideas that asserts that the person does not ultimately exist? I take an oblique approach to this question by focusing on cultural translation, by which I mean the practices and modes of interaction between Buddhism and science 'on the ground' rather than the question of conceptual fidelity. In doing this, I propose the cultural observation that *praxis precedes theory*. In other words, when two different cultural traditions come into contact and substantially engage, it is the perception of practical benefits that will determine which concepts are appropriated and translated (or mis-translated, as is often the case). Because it is easy to be flustered by mis-translations (especially for eggheads like us in Buddhist studies), we overlook the fact that translation is a cultural process that begins first with the perception of concrete benefit. Beyond the care taken by the academic or monastic specialist, there is no reason for a broader public to acquaint itself with the finer points of Buddhist doctrine without some enticement on that public's own terms. It seems that Buddhist meditation *qua* modern therapy offers just such an incentive.

If this were the limit of the broader Western interest in Buddhist meditation, there would be good reason for concern. But the reality is more complicated and thus allows for more interesting possibilities. My second observation is that the dissemination of Buddhism into the modern scientific milieu plays with the Western distinction between the religious and the secular in paradoxical ways that tend to question and unseat this most Western way of dividing the world. On the one hand, Buddhists utilize this distinction in order to tame certain Buddhist terms, such as 'mindfulness,' into a non-religious entity safe for scientific consumption. It is this very scenario, of course, that discomfits the purist of Buddhist tradition: The cloaking of Buddhist meditation practices in the mode of psychotherapy may be all that the encounter ever amounts to, as the dominant Western paradigm suppresses what is remarkably different in the other. What this fear overlooks, however, is that 'secular Buddhism' does not fit the profile of typical scientism and materialist ideologies. The result of this is a Buddhist retranslation of what 'secularism' can entail. Hence what appears to be mere catering to predetermined goods as the West defines them is also a way of rising above one of its most entrenched social dilemmas – the tension between the religious and the secular, and the purported necessity of choosing between them. To fully realize this possibility, however, requires deeper knowledge of Buddhist thought

and practice, in order to embrace its difference from (and challenge to) what Western culture takes for granted. This process is more promising for the robust translation of key Buddhist ideas.

Culturally translating Buddhism

The transmission of Buddhism into China was enabled by a number of social services that the new religion offered, from the familial to the political. The way in which Buddhist ritual provided a way to enhance the indigenous practice of ancestor worship is particularly interesting. The institution of Buddhist monasticism, with its order of celibate monks, seriously clashed with the Chinese concern with preserving and perpetuating the family line. But in the Buddhist ritual system, supporting the monastic order with economic necessities created merit (good karmic fruit) for the donor that could be transferred to his ancestors, ensuring auspicious circumstances in their new lives. Hence an inherently offensive social institution was brilliantly transformed by the Buddhist cosmology of rebirth into a most potent site for the practice of filial piety. What is particularly noteworthy here is both the fact and irrelevance of the clashing conceptual structures brought about by this blending of Buddhist and Confucian practice. Buddhist merit was dedicated to ancestors in the belief that it would help them attain auspicious new births. But in Confucian practice, propitiation of ancestors was premised on the belief that ancestral spirits hovered and remained close to the living, with the power to bring them fortune or harm. Do the ancestors remain with the living, or do they reincarnate? For the Chinese practitioners, resolving the question was of less importance than the added ritual technology for practicing filial piety, which assured the well-being of the living.

The clinical and scientific interest in Buddhist meditation is similarly led by the perception of social and personal benefit. In the past 30 years, the interface between meditation and Western institutions has germinated from the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) protocol, developed in 1979 by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center for the management of chronic pain and stress-related conditions such as hypertension, anxiety, and sleeping disorders. The practice of 'mindfulness' (*sati*) is part of the original eight-fold path of Buddhism and a key aspect of Buddhist meditation. It can be defined basically as the focused examination of the present contents of consciousness, and it is the subject of extensive ancient scriptural texts and contemporary scholarly disquisitions on meditation. For the purposes of MBSR, however, Kabat-Zinn's *Wherever You Go, There You Are* (1994) defines mindfulness quite accessibly as 'paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally' (ibid.: 4). For implementation, MBSR training typically entails an eight- to ten-week outpatient course in sitting meditation with focus on the breath and mindful movement. Patients are also asked

to sit six times a week at home for 45 minutes and extend mindfulness to everyday activities such as walking and eating.

Since its development, MBSR been used to treat cancer patients (Speca *et al.* 2000), eating disorders (Kristeller and Hallett 1999), alcohol and drug addiction (Marlatt 1994), and the education of young children and teens (Napoli *et al.* 2005; Semple *et al.* 2005). Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is an offshoot of MBSR to prevent depression relapse (Segal, Williams and Teasdale 2002), and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is a further evolution that treats borderline personality disorder (Linehan 1993). Mindfulness-based interventions also exist for the treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorder (Schwartz 1996). This broad range of applications is united by the theory that the nonjudgmental acceptance of anxiety and depression-related sensations may lead to reduction in maladaptive responses such as panic, binge eating, and substance abuse. It is hoped that mindfulness-based interventions can be mapped to neurobiological systems underlying various affective disorders (Kabat-Zinn 2003: 153).

But to what degree is MBSR the practice of *Buddhist* meditation, which is a life-long discipline that aims for religious liberation rather than a treatment for medical and psychiatric ills? Though a scion of Western clinical environments, MBSR also reflects the insight meditation (*vipassanā*) revival led by the Burmese teacher Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–82) and further disseminated in the West by Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield of the Insight Meditation Society. Although Asian in origin, where Buddhist meditation is traditionally practiced only by the most serious monks, the revival is also modern in promoting meditation within the broader lay community. Insight meditation is closely allied to mindfulness practice because careful attention to one's mental and physical experiences helps to penetrate and see their true nature – in part by detaching ourselves from our conditioned responses to them. Western scholars frequently contrast insight meditation to the other central meditative technique established by Buddhism – that of concentration (*samadhi*), which cultivates focus on a single object (such as an image or a mantra) rather than following the natural contents of consciousness. The practice of *samadhi* is mapped into eight ascending levels of meditative absorption, and in contrast to insight meditation, their distinctive character is the increasing abandonment of any and all mental content. This side of Buddhist meditation is absent in MBSR.

In comparing MBSR with traditional Buddhist meditation, one scholar notes that they have a 'shared understanding of how mindfulness counteracts unconscious, habitual ways of thinking and responding' (Gilpin 2008: 242). In traditional meditation, however, this aspect of mindfulness is preliminary to seeing the true nature of all phenomena as defined by Buddhist doctrine – that they are impermanent (*anitya*), unsatisfactory (*duhkha*), and insubstantial (*anātman*). When these tenets converge in the Buddhist view that the self does not really exist, we are worlds away from modern

concepts such as self-esteem, which the psychologist Albert Ellis described as a most regrettable idea ‘because it says, “I did well therefore I am good,” which means that when I do badly – back to shithood for me’ (Green 2003). Thus in its fullest practice, mindfulness does not simply aim to de-program our maladaptive responses to pain, fear, and anxiety, or even to cultivate a serene acceptance of things ‘as they are.’ Rather, insight means an active ‘shaping of vision so that it will correspond to the contents of a specific Buddhist “memory”’ (Shulman 2010: 402). Furthermore, this vigorous form of mindfulness works in tandem with the cultivation of *samādhi*, or meditative absorption. Although the description of *samādhi* as the gradual eradication of all cognition appears to contradict the goal of insight, Buddhist tradition itself insists on their mutual reliance. What meditative concentration actually seems to strive for, then, is not a literal emptying of mind but rather movement beyond intellectual knowledge and ordinary cognition to a more intuitive experience of Buddhist wisdom.

MBSR, on the other hand, does not seek to penetrate the true nature of mental and physical events but strives simply to be free of some of their consequences. Richard Gilpin notes that by enhancing control over patients’ negative mental experiences, MBSR may actually reinforce one’s sense of self, contrary to Buddhist goals, and produce unrealistic expectations of meditation. Nevertheless, Gilpin concludes that the goals of MBSR are not in conflict with Buddhism but merely modest in comparison (Gilpin 2008: 243). If relieving stress and other psychiatric conditions is not the final aim of Buddhist meditation, the fact that meditation can be used for such purposes does not automatically detract from or subvert original Buddhist goals. Hence there is nothing inherently ‘anti-Buddhist’ about meditating to allay Western-defined syndromes or even prosaic conditions such as indigestion. The more important question is how much latitude the clinical and scientific setting allows to cultivate specifically Buddhist goals. Successful use in a clinical context requires the rigorous operationalization of MBSR techniques and procedures so that its results can be empirically measured. And the limits of what science can quantify naturally constrain MBSR to bio-physiological effects and statistical measures. Kabat-Zinn himself avers that such clinical ‘menus’ and ‘maps’ are not equivalent to the actual ‘meal’ and ‘territory’ of full-fledged meditation, which is ‘more akin to an art form that one develops over time, and is greatly enhanced through regular disciplined practice, both formally and informally, on a daily basis’ (Kabat-Zinn 2003: 148).

There are some signs that clinicians and scientists are willing to expand considerations of what MBSR might strive for. These signs interestingly arise in the context of measuring the effects of MBSR, which is a task far from complete or conclusive. Systematic reviews of published clinical results reveal that while most therapeutic trials report positive outcomes, they suffer from poor research methodology (Baer 2003; Grossman *et al.* 2004; Smith *et al.* 2005; Toneatto and Nguyen

2007; Ospina *et al.* 2008). Most studies do not control for variables such as passage of time, the placebo effect, and comparison with other treatments. Trials often suffer from insufficient sample size, reports on drop-out rates, and evaluation of therapist training and competence. Many of these problems are attributed to the relative newness of the intervention. More interestingly, however, it is recognized that the most important qualities promoted by Buddhist practice, such as wisdom and compassion, are difficult to measure scientifically. Nevertheless, they are not rejected out of hand: 'although methodologically rigorous investigations of the effects of MBSR are both possible and necessary, perhaps researchers should consider ways to incorporate these other concepts, in addition to more readily measured constructs such as symptom reduction' (Baer 2003: 140). The parameters of Western empirical practice may be expanded even while Buddhist practice is subjected to the former's procedures. Kabat-Zinn suggests that MBSR has already taken such steps by promoting non-attachment to outcome rather than the hope of being healed, which is 'a radical departure from most clinical interventions' (Kabat-Zinn 2003: 148). What is merely preliminary in Buddhist mindfulness practice still represents a paradigm shift in Western clinical therapy.

The persistence of interest in and funding for MBSR interventions in spite of the ultimate orneriness of meditation to empirical evaluation conveys a widespread good faith perception that meditating is good for you. This perception arises from the personal example of Buddhist leaders such as the Dalai Lama; it is facilitated by a recipient culture attuned to mental health and ideals of personal flourishing; and it is given authority by institutional implementation and funding. The rapid proliferation of MBSR interventions in the last 30 years results from the movement of ground-up interests rather than top-down Buddhist doctrines. There may be a gap between the interest and the doctrinal systems, but it is the grounded interest that creates a space for broad social integration. Buddhist mindfulness provides a resource for the contemporary Western demand for therapeutic practices, and Western clinical and scientific sites in turn offer a significant locale for Buddhist tradition to instantiate itself within Western society.

Retranslating religion and science

The interaction between Buddhism and Chinese ancestor worship highlighted a dissonance between the two cultures' views of what happens after death. This clash in ideas about the afterlife was quite explicit, but the Buddhist narrative of karma and rebirth nevertheless took firm hold of the Chinese imagination. The world of Buddhist cosmology, with its six realms of rebirth, multiple heavens and hells, and the calculus of reward and punishment, was far more elaborate than the original Chinese conception of the underworld in which ancestral spirits simply required food, money,



Figure 14.1 A monk, Matthieu Ricard, participates in a research study led by Richard J. Davidson (University of Wisconsin-Madison) that monitors brain waves during meditation

and clothing, much like the living. The practice of offering such amenities to the spirits never died out, but neither could the Chinese resist the wealth of Buddhist ritual and mythology. This Buddhist system not only complied with the pre-existing practice of ancestor worship, it enlarged it immeasurably with the vast world of Indian cosmology and religion.

The dialogue between Buddhism and Western science brings to the fore very different views about the organization of life. A defining characteristic of Western modernity is its distinction between the religious and the secular – a dichotomy that reflects the history of science and its self-understanding as a break away from and even rebellion against Christian religious authority. But the 'confrontation' between Buddhism and the West on this score is not at all confrontational – in fact, the West is captivated by the idea of a Buddhist 'scientific religion,' that is to say, the possibility of an exotic specimen that bridges two antithetical species. It seems intriguing that Buddhism, which has the obvious appurtenances of religion such as monks, rituals, ethical teachings, and the goal of salvation, also includes elements more akin to the sciences. In basic Buddhist teachings, it is mental delusion that creates suffering, and therefore mental cultivation that leads to liberation. The resulting body of traditions, sometimes referred to as Buddhist 'mind science,' cuts across a range of Western disciplines such as psychology, neurology, phenomenology (the empirical observation of experience as it appears to us), and epistemology (the philosophical study of the nature of knowledge). The inclusion of higher mystical and altered consciousness states (*samādhi*) also adds what Western society recognizes as 'religion' proper. The conglomeration of all of these ingredients pays no heed to the 'religious versus secular' paradigm, and thus piques interest.

Such excitement, to be sure, also raises the fear that 'Buddhism is placed at risk by the compulsion to find convergences with Science' (Lopez 2008: 152). Although this concern arises from the impulse to defend Buddhism in its original Asian incarnation, it caves to the Western prejudice about the essential differences between religion and science in an unconscious and reinforcing way. Buddhist leaders also embrace the 'religion versus science' polarity – they readily segment Buddhism into culture-specific 'religious' parts versus its universal and exportable 'scientific' parts. But this is a quite deliberate and expedient use of the distinction, which ultimately plays with and neutralizes the restrictions that it normally poses, as we will see below. 'Religion' and 'science' – not being Buddhist terms and lacking Buddhist investments – lack the usual social and intellectual tensions with which they are freighted in Western culture. Thus rather than being forced to become scientific for the sake of acceptance, it may be the case that Buddhists are in a position to encourage a new conception of science – a conception that helps to remake and expand dominant Western ones.

The Dalai Lama is the exemplar. As if responding directly to Lopez's concern about the risks to Buddhism, the Buddhist leader asserted in a recent (October 2009) Mind

and Life conference that Buddhism does not, in fact, need science to survive. In these meetings with Western scientists and philosophers that have taken place since 1987, the Dalai Lama has repeatedly insisted that the dialogue with science is not 'about Buddhism' as a cultural and institutional entity. Instead, the project in question, he maintains, is to export the human as opposed to religious fruits of Buddhist practice. The use of this rhetorical distinction between the religious and the secular is indispensable because it creates a neutral zone for scientists to participate, and for mindfulness therapy to be implemented, in public institutions. The Dalai Lama's insistence on the secular nature of contemplative practice conforms to his stated goal of propagating universal human benefit – rather than Buddhism *per se*. The claim of inherent secularity is not limited to Buddhist meditation practices. Kabat-Zinn claims that all of Buddhist Dharma, or teachings, is neither belief, ideology, nor philosophy but rather 'a coherent phenomenological description of the nature of mind, emotion, and suffering and its potential release, based on highly refined practices aimed at systematically training and cultivating various aspects of mind and heart via the faculty of mindful attention' (Kabat-Zinn 2003: 145). In this view, mindfulness is the culmination of Buddhist Dharma and an inherent human capacity. Buddhist tradition is simply notable for the degree to which it has developed practices for cultivating and refining this capacity.

But there is irony in this donning of the secular label, inhabited as it is by an indisputably religious figure, whose religious charisma and authority are the critical agents in coalescing the dialogues. In the context of the Mind and Life conferences, which are now open to very large audiences, various ritual elements are clearly on display – the monastic robes, the ceremonial proceedings, the reverence paid to the Dalai Lama. The reassuringly non-religious and non-sectarian nature of the endeavor is guaranteed under the aegis of a centuries-old *Buddhist* tradition and experience, and the Dalai Lama's insistence that it is not *about* Buddhism has the effect of drawing more interest to it. The presence of scientists and researchers may signify secularity, but the forum also creates a space for the discussion of religious values and practices. This is greatly abetted by the presence of Buddhist monastic figures, which facilitates an emphasis on the personal practice of mental cultivation, for which monastics are looked upon as exemplars and reporters. The range of conversation is therefore considerably broader than the question of empirical testing and results.

Neither is it the case that personal religious practice and perspective are limited to monastics. The expansiveness of Buddhist secularity is particularly clear in the MBSR protocol requirement that clinicians and therapists themselves engage in personal practice. According to Kabat-Zinn,

> unless the instructor's relationship to mindfulness is grounded in extensive personal practice, the teaching and guidance one might bring to the clinical

> context will have little in the way of appropriate energy, authenticity, or ultimate relevance, and that deficit will soon be felt by program participants.
>
> *(Kabat-Zinn 2003: 150)*

Modern psychoanalysis perhaps provides a model for this kind of participant-therapist, in that analysts must themselves undergo analysis before they are qualified to analyze. But Kabat-Zinn's talk of 'extensive personal practice' blurs the line between therapy and the murkier terrain of religion. Perhaps references to 'deep experience-based confidence in the practice' and 'one's own intimate engagement and struggles with it' (ibid.) accurately describe the relationship between therapists and their form of therapy, but it is also quite at home in the domain of religious life.

My point is not that MBSR therapists are covert Buddhists in secular disguise. The more significant evolution here is that the secular discourses of therapeutic intervention and neuroscience, in particular, have become an unexpected place for non-reductive talk about things such as religious experience and self-transformation. Indeed, what is most interesting is how the secure identity of the therapist and researcher as secular scientists enables this kind of conversation in a professional and academic context. In our present cultural situation, many of us need the assurance that the secular label provides in order to engage the religious. This reflects the fact that the Western distinction between religion and science has diminished each domain often to the point of caricature. Religion is embraced by some in overt defiance of scientific values and thus is characterized by others as synonymous with irrationality and weakness. The putatively intelligent assessment of religion then employs a much-diminished version of science, expressed as a coldly physicalist and reductive suspicion of religions and their face-value claims. This is not surprising coming from science fundamentalists such as Richard Dawkins. But such cramped and cautious views of religion are a feature of contemporary Western society more generally.

This is perhaps most apparent in how scholars of religion, in their quest to be scientific, are constrained by methodologies that dismiss any normative or sympathetic approaches to religion as inappropriate. The scholar of religion can rightfully object that the academic study of religion should never be confused with being religious. The Supreme Court's distinction between religious instruction, which promotes faith, on the one hand, and 'instruction about religion,' which is the study of human history, on the other, is necessary to justify the study of religion in public domains (Abington Township v. Schempp, 1963). The study of religion, however, is beset with calls to be ever vigilant and self-rectifying, instigated by those who charge that the field is not scientific enough. This indictment follows from the purported problem that many scholars *like* religion too much, to the point of shielding it from truly scientific forms of analysis – that is, reductive readings that unveil religion to be in truth the expression of political, evolutionary, and neurobiological advantage. The

academic study of religion is thus thoroughly embedded in the cultural distinction between the religious and the secular.

The Western myth of secularization has not realized itself with the withering of religion but rather splintered into an object of fascination and revulsion. In either case, circling and demarcating religion, particularly in contrast to science, tends to make both cramped and small. The interface between meditation, particularly Buddhist mindfulness practice, and cognitive science has created an arena in which religion is tamed as science, but a science with the breadth to talk about religious experience in personal and social terms as well as physiological ones. This creates a curious inversion of sorts, in which scientific talk about religion exhibits more heart and openness than professional talk about religion, which seeks to be scientific. If the participation of Buddhists enables this phenomenon, it also encourages us to reflect on how our own operative conceptual structures, such as the distinction between the religious and the secular, are the product of specific and limited modern Western experiences. While there are substantial legal reasons to maintain the distinction, the example of the Buddhism and science interchange reminds us that such concepts are not natural. Given how much the moniker of science is vied for in both our academic and general cultures, it is important not to overlook the unintended prison that moniker can construct. It may be that it takes an entity divested of this value system, such as Buddhism, to provide us with an escape mechanism or, to switch metaphors, to let us eat our cake and have it too.

Conclusion

Reconciling science and religion (to wit, Christianity) is now an academic field trailing after the visceral on-the-ground legal, political, and cultural clashes between their respective defenders. The historical and theological reconciliations offered by Christian scholars offer much food for thought but are limited sites of actual social practice. Buddhist meditation *qua* psychological and clinical therapy is comparatively broader in application and reach. But if this version of Buddhism is an instance of praxis leading theory, in which the promise of concrete and recognizable benefits takes precedence over serious engagement with Buddhist goals and ideas, the depth and sustainability of the enterprise might very well demand something more. This something extra seems to be present in the way Buddhists nimbly negotiate the 'secular' label, unencumbered by its inherent anti-religious meaning, as the very path back to religion itself. This heedlessness of fundamental cultural dualities has the flavor of Buddhist orthodoxy about it – it is much more than expediency, it is in fact fidelity to the Buddhist doctrine that conceptual distinctions are ultimately illusory. It also channels some basic Buddhist claims about its own universal, rather than culture-bound, relevance and aims. In this respect, secularism poses no more

obstruction to this relevance than did ancestor worship in China. It is these qualities that allow Buddhism to expediently retranslate the ‘religion’ and ‘science’ labels, and which stimulate many in Western society to pay closer attention.

Summary

- The perception of similarities between Buddhism and science is not the result of any historical or organic relationship between them. Instead, the dissimilarity between Buddhism and Christianity on certain points of doctrine makes Buddhism seem closer to science in the Western perspective.
- The integration of Buddhism more broadly into Western society is likely to result from Buddhism merging into the institutional and cultural practice of psychology-based therapies.
- Buddhism teaches fundamental doctrines that are alien to Western society, such as the ultimate non-existence of the self. But Buddhist doctrines are also very attractive to many people in contemporary Western society. Buddhist non-dualism toward presumed opposites such as religion and science is one of them.
- The distinction between the religious and the secular is specific to modern Western society rather than a universal or natural cleavage. While the reasons for its existence can be explained historically, it also causes cultural tensions and creates narrow conceptions of both religion and science.

Discussion points

- Is it possible to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for science, such as the demand for empirical verification, which automatically excludes religion?
- Is it possible to identify any necessary and sufficient conditions for religion, such as belief in a creator God, which makes it unscientific?
- What are the implications of the fact that Buddhism is like religion in certain respects, science in others, and like secular philosophy in yet others? Are our categories such as ‘religion’ and ‘science’ natural or culture-specific?
- Research suggests that people in the West have a positive view of Buddhism. Is this the result of selective attention to what is attractive, such as the emphasis on spiritual self-reliance, and the ignoring or misinterpreting of what is alien, such as the ideas of rebirth and no-self?
- What is the ideal process for the blending of two different cultures? Is there usually a winner and loser, in which one fades into the other? Or does this picture create a false and static picture of culture, as in the idea of a single and monolithic ‘Western culture’ and ‘Buddhist culture’?

Further reading

Donald Lopez's *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed* (University of Chicago Press, 2008) and David McMahan's *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford University Press, 2008) provide recent historical discussions of how Buddhism was introduced to Western society as a scientific or science-friendly religion.

The works of B. Alan Wallace, such as *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* (Columbia University Press, 2007), advocate Buddhist meditation as a resource for opening cognitive science to the study of consciousness and subjectivity.

From the other side, neuroscientists demonstrate their interest in the phenomenon of religious experience in titles such as Eugene D'Aquili and Andrew Newberg's *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Mystical Experience* (Fortress Press, 1999).

There are numerous publications in the cognitive sciences produced from the Mind and Life conferences, such as *Gentle Bridges: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on the Sciences of Mind,* ed. Jeremy Hayward and Francisco Varela (Shambhala Publications, 1992). A complete list of these books can be accessed on the Mind and Life Institute website (www.mindandlife.org).

Lizabeth Roemer's *Mindfulness and Acceptance-Based Behavioral Therapies in Practice* (Guilford Press, 2009) is a clinical manual on MBSR therapies, and Chris Mace's *Mindfulness and Mental Health: Therapy, Theory, and Science* provides a general overview of the origins and practice of mindfulness therapy. More academic articles in their respective domains of MBSR intervention can be found on the websites of the following organizations: Association for Mindfulness in Education (www.mindfuleducation.org); Addictive Behaviors Research Center (http://depts.washington.edu/abrc); The Center for Mindful Eating (www.tcme.org).

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15 Buddhism and Globalization

Cristina Rocha

Introduction

In the past 15 years the French company George V Group has established Buddha-Bars and Little Buddha Cafes in 19 different cities of the world. They have become a truly global phenomenon, as many of these venues are located in the developing world and in Asia. In 2007 the company started a new venture by opening its first (of many to come) Buddha Bar Spas in Evian-les-Bains, France. In addition, the company sells Buddha-Bar CDs and T-shirts. On its web page, the company advertises the international chain of Buddha-Bars with these words:

> Dining at Buddha-Bar means removing yourself from the frenzy of urban life and plunging into a rejuvenating bath. As soon as you've entered this remarkable place with its monumental proportions, you'll be enthralled by the charm of its soothing, exotic atmosphere. The bar mezzanine, enlaced by 18th century style wrought-iron balustrades, looks out over the dining area where the gigantic Buddha – the bar's namesake – sits serenely enthroned. The amber-coloured lighting, rich mahogany furniture, Chinese and Japanese art objects, Khmer statues, decorated wood panels, lush reds and gold, luxurious fabrics and Portuguese mosaics all come together to create an opulent and refined décor. In Buddha-Bar wonderland, your taste buds travel to distant lands and inventiveness nests in your plate. The chef creates an edible masterpiece that skillfully combines exotic delicacies with high-end cuisine. The best DJs distill their musical selections to infuse your evenings in this sanctuary with an indescribable sensuality. The experience is brilliantly engraved in the famous Buddha-Bar compilations.
>
> *(http://www.buddhabar-london.com)*

How are we to understand the associations of Buddha (and consequently Buddhism) with bars, alcohol, lounge music, wonderland, high-end cuisine, and sensuality? Has Buddhism changed so much since the stories about the Buddha and his teachings were written down? Granted, there was a backlash in some Asian countries when Buddha-Bars were established. People protested on the streets in Indonesia, and in Sri Lanka the government opposed it. Although some Western Buddhists were upset, the international chain continues to open new venues without incident. Undoubtedly, the spread of Buddha-Bars is not the same as the globalization of Buddhism *per se*. However, it demonstrates the extent to which Buddhism has entered the Western imaginary and how much this imaginary has been globalised.

Underscoring the importance of the imaginary in the contemporary world, Arjun Appadurai has argued that 'The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order' (Appadurai 1996: 31). This popular imaginary carried through mass-mediated images conflates Buddhism with (among other qualities) tranquility, happiness, peace, and harmony



Figure 15.1 Buddha-Bar in Jakarta

with oneself and nature. The company cleverly associates these ideas with its Buddha-Bars, which then become a 'sanctuary' where one can escape 'the frenzy of urban life' in order to be 'rejuvenated' through beauty, refinement, exquisite food, soothing music, and relaxation. This may appeal to many Westerners who desire to escape their ever busier lives. As these ideas arrive on Asian shores, they may clash with or enter an Asian cosmopolitan imaginary of Buddhism as well. These new forms, in turn, may be 'exported' to branch temples located in the West frequented mostly by Asian Buddhist migrants, and may create disjunctures which will lead to conflicts over the 'real' Buddhism.

Globalization: Homogeneity or Heterogeneity?

Globalization is not a new phenomenon. One has just to bring to mind the Silk Road, the Roman Empire, and maritime expeditions to see that cultural encounters have always taken place. Travelers, merchants, missionaries, and conquerors have been the primary conduits of this process. What is new is, of course, the intensification

of mobility due to cheaper and better means of communication and transport in the past three decades. This has meant that this process of cultural contact, exchange, and negotiation has taken an enormous leap. When scholars started writing about globalization in the early 1990s, they were mostly analyzing the economic aspects of this process. Globalization was then associated with a triumphant narrative of global capitalism due to the fall of the supranational ideology of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this light, globalization would be a process by which the entire world would come to modernity, which would in turn lead to cultural homogenization (or 'MacDonaldization,' since it was associated with US imperialism).

In the past 15 years, much has changed in our understanding of globalization. The narrative of globalization as homogenization has been replaced by one in which the tension between homogenization and heterogenization is a driving force. The notion that locality comes under siege in modern societies has its origins in the myth of progress that emerged during the Enlightenment. Progress was defined in terms of a single linear model of development. Societies and cultures were hierarchically ranked as more or less 'civilized' or 'developed' depending on either their temporal distance from or proximity to modernity. It was believed that modernity would spread from Europe to the rest of the world, leading to the homogenization of local cultures. In sum, the global would eventually annihilate the local.

We cannot deny the massive cultural and economic effects of Western imperialism upon the world. Yet it is problematic to assume that these transformations constitute the homogenization of world cultures through the gradual spreading of Western modernity. Ethnographic works on local cultural practices show that foreign objects, practices, and ideas are reinterpreted by the local (Yan 1997, Wilk 1995). In some cases, this process of reception may constitute a mode of resistance against hegemonic forms of global culture. Robertson has coined the trope of 'glocalization' to make it explicit that the global and the local are two facets of the same process (Robertson 1995). Others used the concepts of hybridity (Bhabha 1994; Pieterse 1995; Papastergiadis 1997; Werbner and Modood 1997) and creolization (Hannerz 1987, 1996; Prothero 1996; Rocha 2006) to explain how the encounter between the global and the local takes place and the new forms it engenders. Writing in regards to imperialism, Homi Bhabha (1994) argues that the colonial world is not homogenized or westernized under Empire. He is against the Western production of the binary oppositions center/margin, civilized/savage, and enlightened/ignorant. He argues that the first term of the binary is allowed to unthinkingly dominate the second, when in fact cultures interact and transform each other in much more complex ways. According to Bhabha, this interaction should be analyzed in terms of hybridity. For him, a hybrid is not simply a mixture of the two previous identities or cultures, but a 'third space,' a place for 'the negotiation of incommensurable differences, ... where difference is neither

One nor the Other *but something else besides*, in-between' (Bhabha 1994: 218–19, italics in the original).

Furthermore, empirical studies have shown that global flows do not radiate only between central metropolitan powers and peripheries, in a north–south direction, as imagined by the Enlightenment. There is a multiplicity of centers from which global flows radiate, and they have diverse itineraries and directions. One of the first scholars to demonstrate this was Arjun Appadurai. In his *Modernity at Large* (1996), he emphasizes forces of heterogenization and chaos in contemporary transnational interactions. Drawing on the idea of rhizome[1] developed by the French poststructuralist theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987), Appadurai asserts that the West is just one of the nodes from which global cultural flows emanate. Like a rhizome, the global cultural economy does not spread from one particular center, but moves around in a chaotic and unpredictable pattern (Appadurai 1996: 29). In order to examine these transnational cultural flows, he proposes a system of five overlapping dimensions of the global cultural economy: ethnoscapes (flows of people such as migrants, tourists, missionaries, refugees, guest workers), mediascapes (flows of information through the media and the images created by these media), technoscapes (flows of technology such as the Internet), financescapes (flows of investment, capital, and commodities), and ideoscapes (flows of ideas). Current cultural traffic would take place in and through the disjunctures among these five 'scapes' (ibid.: 33–6). They are also responsible for the construction of a collective imaginary of Buddhism. Appadurai points out that such 'scapes' are not objective but contextual, constructed by the actors according to their historical, linguistic, and political location. Local conditions and practices shape and determine the way in which globalizing forces take place in particular concrete circumstances.

In the next sections, we will see the ways in which the encounter between global and local has spawned processes of hybridity and resistance in the context of the globalization of Buddhism. We will also see how the spread of Buddhism around the world resembles a rhizome, where there is not one particular center from which all flows derive, but multiple centers and peripheries. Finally, we will use Appadurai's five 'scapes' to explore global flows of Buddhism.

Responding to 'thick' globalization: Modern and traditional Buddhisms

Fluidity of religion across political boundaries is old. Buddhism, like any other religion, has always been on the move. Before the eighteenth century, Buddhism was disseminated mostly in Asia. Departing from the region which is now India, particular forms of Buddhism arrived in new locations. New hybrid and diversified forms of Buddhism were then engendered in each region. For instance, while flows of

Buddhism arriving in Tibet were hybridized with local religious forms (Bon) to create the Vajrayāna school of Buddhism, flows of the Mahāyāna school arriving in China gave rise to a multitude of schools such as Chan, Pure Land, and Tiantai. They were later disseminated into Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. In each region Buddhist ideas were hybridized with the local religious culture. The same is true for the constitution of Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. However, as Queen notes, 'local variations that took root in places like Ceylon, Afghanistan, Tibet, Mongolia, Japan, Cambodia, and Indonesia remained largely isolated from one another' (Queen 2002: 326). Following Held *et al.* (1999), Vasquez and Marquardt call this the 'thin' globalization of world empires, in which although there are extensive global networks, intensity and impact of flows are low (Vasquez and Marquardt 2003: 36).

By contrast, according to Vasquez and Marquardt, the nineteenth century sees the emergence of 'thick' globalization dominated by the capitalist mode of production, a world system of core and peripheral countries and powerful technological advances. 'Thick' globalization is marked by a higher intensity, speed, and impact of the previous extensive global networks (ibid.: 36). In the past three decades this process has intensified dramatically. There are several consequences to this 'thick' globalization in relation to religion. Levitt argues that 'many religions have become multi-centered, which differs from their multi-sitedness of the past' (Levitt 2006). By that she means that flows move 'not simply from the religion's center to periphery,' but that 'multiple new centers' emerge (ibid.). Furthermore, religious groups may either take a conservative path and use religion to emphasize difference and a return to its foundations (as in fundamentalist movements), or take a more relativistic approach and embrace change. For Peter Beyer (2001) these are 'pure types' and there are many hybrid forms that fall between these two extremes. As we will see in this section, these consequences of 'thick' globalization are reflected in the globalization of Buddhism as well.

Although ideas about Buddhism had sparsely arrived in the West before the nineteenth century, only then did Europeans begin studying Buddhist texts and disseminating them in Europe (Lopez 2002: 2). The following century bore the consequences of this encounter between Europe and Asia. According to Heine and Prebish, the impact of modernization forces on traditional Buddhist schools has given rise to 'either a return to the sources of the tradition or reform tendencies' (Heine and Prebish 2003: 5). Among these 'reform tendencies' is the creation of the so-called 'modern Buddhism' (Lopez 2002) or 'Buddhist modernism' (McMahan 2008). According to Lopez, 'modern Buddhism shares many of the characteristics of the projects of modernity' (op. cit.: ix). It rejects ritual and magic and embraces rationality, individualism, universalism, and empiricism. Buddhism becomes a 'system of rational and ethical philosophy, divorced from the daily practices of the vast majority of Buddhists' (ibid.: xvii). Lopez believes that this modern Buddhism is a truly international Buddhism, transcending 'cultural

and national borders, creating ... [a] cosmopolitan network of intellectuals, writing most often in English' (ibid.: xxxix).

Importantly, Buddhist modernism was created as much in Asia as in the West. The West is not the only center of dissemination of culture, but as Appadurai (1996) and others have noted, is one of many possible nodes from which flows depart. According to McMahan,

> [T]his new form of Buddhism has been fashioned by modernizing Asian Buddhists and Western enthusiasts deeply engaged in creating Buddhist responses to the dominant problems and questions of modernity, such as epistemic uncertainty, religious pluralism, the threat of nihilism, conflicts between science and religion, war, and environmental destruction.
>
> *(McMahan 2008: 5)*

This reformed Buddhism was created and spread around the globe in a rhizomatic fashion. For instance, in Sri Lanka/Ceylon and Myanmar/Burma, this new form of Buddhism originated as a reaction to colonialism in order to strengthen the national identity and religion. It was created by educated urban elites buoyed by the high profile that Buddhism enjoyed among Western intellectuals. Important figures in this Buddhist renewal were Anagarika Dharmapāla and the founders of the Theosophical Society, Olcott and Blavatsky (Baumann 2001: 9). In China, the impact of the presence of Christian missionaries and the arrival of Western ideas of science, rationality, and progress in the mid nineteenth century gave rise to two different responses. While conservative movements took place in remote inland temples and in North China, a Buddhist modernist approach, associated with Master Taixu and a rising merchant, urban, and cosmopolitan class, flourished in coastal cities where there was intensive contact with the West and Japan (Ashiwa and Wank 2005: 222–3). As in other Asian settings, in Japan Nationalistic Buddhism (*Shin Bukkyō*) developed as a response to the Western secular critique of religion. In order to secure Buddhism a meaningful place in Japanese modern society at a time in which it was being discredited by state Shinto, *Shin Bukkyō* intellectuals deployed European ideas of anti-clericalism and anti-ritualism of the Reformation, and the rationalism and empiricism of the Enlightenment, to reconstruct Buddhism as 'modern, cosmopolitan, humanistic, and socially responsible ... a world religion [that was] empirical, rational and in full accord with the findings of modern science' (Sharf 1995: 110).

Within this milieu, D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) and the philosophers of the Kyoto School constructed Zen Buddhism not as a religion with its rituals and doctrine, but as an individual spiritual experience, which would lead to 'an uncompromisingly empirical, rational and scientific mode of inquiry into the nature of things' (ibid.: 111). By identifying this spiritual experience with a 'timeless', 'pure,' and 'invariable' Zen

'essence,' and differentiating it from its cultural expressions (regarded as degenerate, 'impure' accretions), these Zen advocates were able to regard it as transcultural and universal. Zen would not be associated with any particular religion, philosophy or metaphysics, but would be 'the spirit of all religion and philosophy' (Faure 1993: 57). Given that D. T. Suzuki and other intellectuals who popularized Zen in the West were not part of institutional Zen sects and lacked formal transmission in a Zen lineage, it is not surprising that they advocated 'authentic' Zen as an individual, lay experience that did not require an association with institutional tradition. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of Buddhism in the West is a hybrid of lay and monastic practices. Most Western practitioners are married and work, while they practice meditation and study of sacred texts.

Because modern Buddhism fit so well the Western zeitgeist, it captured Westerners' imagination and flourished. The Zen boom of the late 1950s and 1960s is a good example of that. Importantly, while Asia was mostly the center from which flows of modern Buddhism departed, once they took root in the metropolitan centers of the West, flows of Western Buddhism started arriving back in Asia reinforcing modernizing trends and creating hybrid forms. In Japan, they impacted the Zen practice of some Japanese since the 1980s. In addition to their donations to and funerals in the Zen Buddhist temple, some followers started meditation groups – a practice hitherto solely of monastics in Asia.

Global Buddhism

Several scholars have argued that in the past three decades we have entered a period of global Buddhism. For Martin Baumann, this period is characterized by:

> emphasis on lay practice and participation, the critical evaluation of women's roles, the application of democratic and egalitarian principles, the close linkage to Western psychological concepts, the conceptualization of a socially and engaged Buddhism, and the creation of an ecumenical, nonsectarian tradition
>
> *(Baumann 2001: 23)*

Although Baumann admits that these are primarily characteristics of Western Buddhism, he believes they are becoming relevant in Buddhist migrant circles. In addition, global Buddhism is characterized by the presence of several traditions in one place. While each country used to be 'dominated by a single main tradition, ... since the 1950s ... a plurality of Buddhist traditions emerged' (ibid.: 17). As a consequence of this plurality and high diversity, there is a tendency to seek ecumenism and unity amongst the various traditions (Prebish and Baumann 2002: 4).

This new phase of Buddhism is due to the increased mobility of Asian and Western teachers, monks, nuns, and missionaries, together with the arrival of a considerable

number of Asian migrants in the West since the mid 1960s. It is noteworthy that flows of Buddhism have intensified not only between Europe, the USA, and Asia. Like a rhizome, they now span the globe, connecting other regions as well, such as South America, Africa, and Oceania. Buddhist traditions, schools, and institutions are working on a global scale. Furthermore, new centers of authority have been created, illustrating Levitt's claim of the multi-centeredness of contemporary religion (Levitt 2006). This means that rather than moving only from Asian centers to the periphery (as in the case of flows of Zen from Japan to the West), flows of Buddhism start departing from sites other than Asia. Indeed, Prebish and Baumann have observed that 'with the end of the 20th century we have entered a period in which the globalization of Buddhism has truly begun, because a multi- or polycentric form is emerging' (Prebish and Baumann 2002: 7). For instance, the establishment of the Triratna Buddhist Community in London in 1967 (until April 2010 known as Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, FWBO) means that the UK has become the center from which teachers of the tradition depart to give teachings, and to which head students from all over the world. One can find branches of the TBC/FWBO in countries as diverse as Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Venezuela, Turkey, India, and the USA, to name just a few. The same is true for the Diamond Sangha established by Robert Aitken and his wife in Hawaii in 1959. There are Diamond Sangha centers in several cities in the USA, Germany Australia, Argentina, Chile, and New Zealand, and rather than Asia, the USA is the center of the tradition.

My research in Brazil has found good illustrations of these globalizing trends (Rocha 2006). Brazil was never isolated from Buddhist ideas circulating in the world. In the late nineteenth century, Brazilians travelling to Paris brought back with them ideas and books on Buddhism. In the mid twentieth century, Japanese migrants and the American Zen Boom informed the Brazilian understanding of Buddhism. Presently, Japan is still an important center of monastic Zen training, but Brazilians may also travel to Zen temples in the USA for training. As in other countries, there is a plurality of traditions and schools in the country due to the growth of Asian migration and the high mobility of foreign teachers and locals. For instance, Buddhist connections between Brazil and South Africa were established when Heila and Rodney Downey – disciples of the Korean Zen master Seung Sahn and heads of a Dharma center in South Africa – started visiting Brazil for lectures and retreats in the late 1990s. Heila Downey was previously a student of Philip Kapleau, a teacher of Japanese Zen in Rochester, NY. In this case, South Africa became a center for Korean Zen rather than Korea itself. Another example is the establishment of flows from Tibet to Brazil via the USA. Chagdud Rinpoche, a Tibetan Lama of the Nyingma School, fled from Tibet to India in 1959. He moved to the USA in 1983, and in 1994 he relocated permanently to the south of Brazil, where he and his disciples built a large Tibetan monastery. Although he passed away in 2002, his presence in Brazil meant that the Brazilian monastery was the global center for his disciples who lived in other parts of the world.

While *ethnoscapes*, to use Appadurai's concept, seem to be the main driver of global Buddhism, other 'scapes' – *technoscapes*, *mediascapes* and *financescapes* – are heavily involved in its dissemination. *Technoscapes*, in the form of the Internet, have become a powerful tool in the spread of Buddhist ideas and practices globally. Most Buddhist schools have websites in which they convey teachings, compile a directory of branches worldwide, advertise activities, and sell props, DVDs, and books. Some sites use video clips featuring their teachers' and monastics' interviews and teachings; others promote online practice. Mary Jaksch, a Diamond Sangha Zen teacher in Nelson, New Zealand, is a good example of the latter. She offers virtual Zen retreats in her blog (http://goodlifezen.com/virtual-retreats). For six days subscribers receive a daily retreat email with readings, guidance, exercises, and encouragement, while continuing on with their daily lives. They can also receive daily Twitter reminders, share their experiences, and be guided by her on an online forum. Jaksch also offers three live webinars (online conferences) for subscribers to participate in, as well as downloadable podcasts. When asked in a radio interview where subscribers were from, Jaksch said she was expecting people from Sydney, New Zealand, and perhaps New York to contact her. But in fact, people from Pakistan, Trinidad, Alaska, China, and London, Paris, and New York have participated in the virtual retreats. She went on to say, 'it's totally and absolutely international' (Jaksch, ABC Radio National, August 22, 2010). As with any innovation, the reaction came swiftly. Her virtual retreats have been criticized by another Diamond Sangha teacher. She responded by saying:

> I think there's something really missing in Zen training, and this is something I want to really address. And that is, it's one thing to go to a traditional Zen retreat and be away from ordinary everyday life and immerse yourself in the practice. But the missing step is taking that practice and bringing [it] into life. And that's where a lot of people have difficulties ... what we've done in the West is we took the Japanese model of Zen, the monastic tradition, and kind of used that in the West in a secular society. And so that doesn't work particularly well, it only works for a certain time. But I think ultimately in 20 years' time that will go.
>
> *(ibid.)*

The latest addition to online practice is the presence of Buddhist temples and communities on the 3D virtual world site Second Life (www.secondlife.com). There, participants choose an 'avatar' that, in turn, is able to walk into temples, sit in meditation, listen to teachings, and interact with other Buddhist-inclined avatars. The virtual and real worlds are connected in that real (mostly Western) Buddhist teachers are the ones setting up temples and/or providing instruction on meditation and chanting. In August 2010 there were 95 Buddhist communities on Second Life. Sōka Gakkai – the Japanese-origin global Buddhist school – has three communities in

Second Life, more than any other school. Of course the online presence of Buddhism is not confined to the Western world. For instance, a virtual Buddhist temple run by a group of young Japanese monks (www.higan.net) endeavors to explain traditional Japanese culture and Buddhism in English and Japanese. These monks subscribe to modern Buddhism since there is no clear mention of a specific tradition, and the site displays excerpts of writings by many of those whom Lopez (2002) deemed to be part of a modern Buddhist lineage such as D. T. Suzuki, Thích Nhât Hanh and the Dalai Lama. They also sell Buddhist props, books (in conjunction with Amazon), and advertise their café in Tokyo. In relation to Thailand, Taylor has observed that 'Thai language Buddhist websites are mushrooming' (Taylor 2003: 299). This is probably not different in other Asian countries.

Mediascapes 'refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations and film production studios) ...and to the images of the world created by these media' (Appadurai 1996: 35). Images of Buddhism have circulated intensely around the world in the past 20 years through film (*The Cup*, *Little Buddha*, *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, to name a few mainstream ones), books (the Dalai Lama alone is responsible for several bestsellers in many parts of the world), and the media in general. *Mediascapes* are, of course, closely connected to *technoscapes*. The Buddhist Channel (http://www.buddhistchannel.tv) is an online news site that covers Buddhist news, art, culture, and travel stories from around the globe. Many Buddhist magazines such as Tricycle (www.tricycle.com) and Shambhala Sun (www.shambhalasun.com) are sold in newsstands but also have websites in which part of the magazines' content is published as open source. These websites also have shops in which Buddhist books and postcards are sold. The Tricycle website conducts online retreats, sells mp3 recordings of teachings, and is present on Facebook and Twitter. From these examples, one can see that the world of commodities and the world of media and the Internet are profoundly interconnected (Appadurai 1996: 35). Together with the presence of Buddhist migrants, missionaries, and teachers they create an (at many times disjunctive[2]) imaginary of Buddhism that circulates around the world. This imaginary, as Appadurai argues, is contingent and contextual. It is localized in diverse ways in different parts of the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated the ways in which the globalization of Buddhism is part of a much larger phenomenon of the globalization of culture. Mass migration and mass-mediated images have heightened the importance of the work of imagination in the contemporary world. The presence of Asian Buddhist migrants and institutions in the West, of highly mobile Buddhist practitioners, teachers and missionaries, of

the mass-mediated and electronic media, of the products of cultural industries such as movies, books, CDs, DVDs, and the Internet, have impacted on how Buddhism is imagined globally. This imaginary is contested in, or hybridized with, the local. Global flows do not travel and settle in empty space. They are 'localized'; that is, they interact and are reinterpreted according to local conditions. The ways in which Zen Buddhism is understood and practiced by someone who belongs to this school in Japan is different from the way it is understood and practiced by a lay follower in North America, for instance.

I also demonstrated that in a time of 'thick' globalization, Asia is one of the centers from which global flows of Buddhism depart. There are new centers in the Global North and in the Global South. Moreover, peripheries can become centers and vice versa. Global flows move around the globe in rhizomatic ways. For example, while Brazil is more often than not a periphery for such flows, it can become a center when a well-known Tibetan Rinpoche relocates and establishes a monastery there.

Finally, I used Appadurai's system of five overlapping dimensions of the global culture economy to show that Buddhism circulates around the world carried by people (migrants, missionaries, teachers, monastics, students), the media (information and images), technology (the Internet, movies), and commodities and consumerism (there is a vast number of Buddhist books, meditation props, CDs, DVDs). Importantly, these dimensions are disjunctive, that is, each may convey different ideas, practices, and beliefs regarding Buddhism. The vignette with which I opened this chapter associated Buddhism with ideas that are present in popular culture. Buddhist teachers and monastics would surely not associate Buddhism with relaxation, luxury, refinement, or sensuality. At the same time, when Westerners arrive in Asian countries, many are shocked by the devotional practices (prostrations, offerings, praying, and so forth) of Buddhist followers. For them, Buddhism is a 'non-ritualistic, non-theistic religion of mystics, meditators, and philosophers' (Swearer 2003: 7). In the West, first-generation Buddhist migrants may associate Buddhism with identity, a sense of belonging, everyday life practices, and nostalgia for the homeland. Their offspring may associate Buddhism with old people and old practices, and want nothing to do with it. It is in and through these disjunctures that current global flows of Buddhism occur.

Summary

- Until the eighteenth century Buddhism was mostly disseminated in Asia.
- This is a time of 'thin' globalization (extensive networks, low intensity of flows).
- 'Thick' globalization since the nineteenth century (high intensity and impact of flows).
- Buddhist modernism as a response to the arrival of modernity in Asia.

- Global Buddhism: several traditions in one place, new centers of authority, it spreads like a rhizome.
- Globalization of Buddhism takes place in and through five dimensions of the global culture economy (people, media, technology, commodities, and ideas).

Discussion points

- In what ways are the Buddha-Bars connected to Buddhist modernism?
- What does it mean to say that the process of globalization constitutes a tension between homogenization and heterogenization of the world?
- Can you name some forms of hybrid Buddhism?
- Give examples of new centers of authority and legitimacy of Buddhism.
- Is online Buddhist practice legitimate? How do online retreats/practices compare to the physical, real-world retreats/practices?

Further reading

Chandler, S. (2004) *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization*, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

This book addresses a Taiwanese new Buddhist movement’s attempt to spread Humanistic Buddhism around the world.

Learman, L. (2005) (ed.) *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

This volume covers the role of missionaries in disseminating Buddhism in the contemporary world.

Lopez, D. (1995) (ed.) *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

This volume examines the influence of colonization and modernization in the ways in which Buddhism was taken up by Western academia.

Seager, R. (1999) *Buddhism in America*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

This book addresses the localization of Buddhism in the United States, including its history, the role of immigrants, and adaptations to the new environment.

Tweed, T. (2006) *Crossings and Dwellings: A Theory of Religion*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

This book addresses the globalization of religion from an ‘on the ground’ empirical approach.

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Notes

1 Rhizome is a botanical term that describes the way in which certain plants (e.g. grass) spread across the ground rather than putting down a central root system. Deleuze and Guattari note that ‘unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 21).

2 For more on the disjunctions and inequities of power between migrants’ Buddhist beliefs and practices and those of Westerners, see Rocha 2006: 183–92; Pierce 2000; Hickey 2010.

16 Buddhism, Media and Popular Culture

Scott A. Mitchell

Introduction

Exhibit A

In 2006, the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji Temple in Kyoto, Japan released a four-part animated movie about the life of their tradition's founder, Shinran Shonin (1173–1263). The anime movie dramatized his entry at the age of nine into the Tendai monastery on Mt Heiei outside Japan following the death of his parents. His struggle with Buddhism, his conversion to Pure Land practice, his eventual turning away from Tendai and his marriage to Eshinni were all dramatized in the familiar modes of Japanese animation.

The film series was an explicit attempt on the part of the Hongwanji to reach out to a younger generation of Buddhists in Japan who, like their counterparts in other highly modernized societies, are becoming increasingly secularized. Moreover, Japanese Buddhism has long had to fight against a stereotype of being out of touch with modern sensibilities and closely tied to the business of funerals and memorial services. For some time now, centuries-old Buddhist establishments have been dismissed as nothing more than 'funeral Buddhism' by their detractors (Covell 2005).

Older audiences were not impressed by the Shinran anime, claiming that the film was at best merely a watered-down and overly simplistic take on his life and teachings – at worst it was outright offensive to the venerable founder. The film's target audience, younger viewers, were not much more impressed. Many were bored, unable to hold their attention through the 108-minute running time (Makino and Ogi 2009).

Exhibit B

For the past several years, Rod Meade Sperry has been chronicling what he calls 'Dharma Burgers' – instances of Buddhism showing up in popular culture or being co-opted for the purposes of capitalism – on his website, The Worst Horse (www.theworsthorse.com). Among the endless supply of products marketed for their Zen-like qualities, the countless examples of meditating figures and scantily clad women in various yoga positions selling, among other things, male enhancement products, the site contains a series of posts about 'body vows.'

The series is a collection of mostly user-submitted photos of tattoos of Buddhist imagery. Sanskrit and Tibetan phrases and mantras, *dharmacakra*, *vajras*, *dorjes*, *bodhisattvas*, Buddhas, and even the face of the Dalai Lama himself are tattooed on young Buddhist bodies (image 16.1). According to Meade Sperry, these tattoos represent one way that Buddhism is manifesting itself in and being assimilated into modern, Western culture. But they are more than that; they are also ways that their owners can express their commitment to Buddhist practice, a permanent marker of their Buddhist identity.



Figure 16.1 Tattoo of Buddhist mantra (*om mani padme hum*) in Tibetan script

Others are not enamored by Dharma tattoos, worrying that a trendy lifestyle choice cannot take the place of 'real' Buddhist practice. Or, in the blunt words of Daniel Pinchbeck, 'West Coast hipsters' seem to think that 'tattooing the Buddha on your ass [is] easier than pursuing the eightfold noble path to enlightenment' (Pinchbeck 2006: 305). A blogger at the Digital Tibetan Buddhist Altar believes that the whole project of documenting Dharma Burgers is itself a sure sign that we have entered the Age of Kali, an age of spiritual decline (Digital Tibetan Buddhist Altar: http://tibetanaltar.blogspot.com/2009/04/top-ten-signs-this-is-kaliyuga.html). But Meade Sperry remains hopeful that even though

> There's always going to be a guy with a Buddha tattoo who doesn't even know who the Buddha was ... there are going to be plenty of people who are using traditional dharmic expressions in a way that is their own. It's not just about tattoos.
> *(Winston 2008: 46)*

Exhibit C

In 2003, the North American fruit-juice smoothie franchise Jamba Juice rolled out a new line of products called 'Enlightened Smoothies.' The smoothies, according to an email from a customer services representative, were inspired by the idea of 'enlightenment,' both 'the play off of "light" in the word, and the positive feelings the product creates' (personal email to author). And if there was any doubt that the 'enlightenment' that served as inspiration referred to the Buddhist conception of enlightenment, the accompanying advertising campaign featured Tibetan-inspired *thangka* paintings.

Thangka paintings in traditional Tibetan Buddhist art and religious culture are intended to be visual representations of the cosmic order, aids to complex tantric visualization practices, and embodiments of deities themselves. The paintings generally feature various celestial beings ensconced in the landscape of Buddhist cosmology surrounding a central figure, an object of devotion, usually a Buddha or *bodhisattva*, all in vivid, striking colors.

The Jamba Juice ad campaign featured posters of such paintings that reflected this style with surprising accuracy – in part because the artist hired to do the work was himself a traditionally trained Tibetan artist living in the USA. Gone of course were the overtly religious symbols, the various celestial beings, Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*; in their place were brightly colored clouds and landscapes. And the central object of devotion was the familiar Jamba Juice smoothie in its styrofoam cup.

Whether it is Buddhists using new media such as anime or the Internet to propagate the Dharma or corporations employing the iconography and rhetoric of enlightenment to sell their products, it is clear that Buddhism in the modern world

has become a ubiquitous presence both in mainstream media and in popular culture. This ubiquitous quality gives the researcher a near inexhaustible supply of subjects for study. Whereas, to some extent, Buddhists have always used the media and culture of their day to express themselves and propagate the Buddha's teachings, the modern occurrence of Buddhism in pop culture is set apart by its close associations with systems of global capitalism. Moreover, the history of colonialism and the representation of Buddhism and Buddhists to Western audiences raise complex questions about cultural appropriation and the authenticity of using Buddhist images in non-Buddhist contexts.

The following chapter introduces the reader to some of these issues and provides a context in which to discuss pop-cultural Buddhism in a meaningful way. Following a brief overview of some critical terms, I will explore the more prominent critiques of and discussions about Buddhism in pop culture. Whereas there is a dearth of scholarly material on the phenomenon, the wealth of examples suggests that this is a topic well deserving of further study.

Defining Media and popular culture

Historically, Buddhist studies as an academic discipline has not been particularly concerned with popular culture or media. Critical analysis has come from other disciplines such as anthropology and sociology and, more recently, media studies – disciplines that are not predisposed to make religion, let alone Buddhism, the primary focus of their research, rather treating it as one aspect of a broader focus of study. Thus, any analysis of Buddhism in the media or pop culture is almost by definition interdisciplinary, utilizing a variety of methodological tools and modes of criticism. At the outset, then, we would do well to start with some definitions to set limits to our study. What do we mean by 'the media' or 'pop culture'? Or, for that matter, what do we mean by 'Buddhism'?

Pop culture is generally contrasted with either elite or high culture on the one hand, and folk culture on the other. Bruce David Forbes provides an extremely helpful metaphor in the introduction to *Religion and Popular Culture in America*: 'high culture is a gourmet meal, folk culture is grandma's casserole, and popular culture is a McDonald's hamburger' (Forbes 2005: 2). The metaphor points to the limits and intended audiences of different categories of culture. High culture is assumed to be relatively limited in its reach, directed toward those with a presumed higher set of standards, tastes, or incomes. Folk culture is similarly limited to specific families or smaller, regional locations. Pop culture, in contrast, has broad appeal and reach, and is almost always assumed to be delivered through the mass media. Thus an academic journal, with its audience limited to a small number of trained specialists within a specific scholarly field, would be considered a part of high culture. This summer's crop

of blockbuster movies, promoted *ad nauseam* in television commercials and billboards, and marketed to as wide an audience as possible, is the very definition of pop culture.

There is an obvious connection between pop culture and various forms of mass media. As the above food metaphor illustrates, one of the qualities of pop culture, implicit in its name, is that it is enjoyed by large groups of people – it is *popular* – and various mass media outlets aid in this popularity. And 'media' seems to be all around us. Taking an infinite number of forms, it is the sum total of books, magazines, newspapers, websites, blogs, movies, film, video, music, television, comic books, graphic novels, theater, fashion, consumer culture, news, and commentary on any of the above which is, it seems, never-ending. All of which makes 'the media' and popular culture fields of study that are, to paraphrase Ray Browne, indistinct with edges that blur into imprecision (Browne 1977). Thankfully, definitive answers are beyond the scope of this chapter; it is enough here to suggest some tentative boundaries knowing how permeable such boundaries are. Critical inquiry of media and pop culture remains relevant, however, because such studies reveal how we see ourselves as a people, our own cultural values and beliefs, and they ultimately reveal much about the social world we inhabit.

Of course, the social world we currently inhabit is defined in large part by the increasing interconnection of once disparate cultural spheres. Global networks of communication and commerce enable elements of culture, indeed full cultures and their people, to flow about the world and interact with other cultures with incredible ease. Arjun Appadurai has proposed a five-fold framework for describing global cultural flows including:

(1) ethnoscapes
(2) mediascapes
(3) technoscapes
(4) ideoscapes
(5) financescapes

(Appadurai 1996: 33)

While Appadurai suggests that religion is part of the ideoscape, elements of religious culture permeate multiple categories to the extent that religion is often irrevocably bound up with ethnicities, media, technology, and economies. Nevertheless, each of these 'scapes' has in its own way implications for the study of Buddhism, media, and pop culture. Elements of pop culture appear in all of these realms as individual persons, media images, ritual technologies, Dharma messages, and the buying and selling of all of the above in the global capitalist marketplace. Media at the dawn of the twenty-first century is often global in reach while, simultaneously, locally enacted. As the examples at the start of this chapter make clear, Buddhism and pop culture is a

concern not just of the modern West but one that has implications in other cultural contexts. The uses of media and pop culture will depend on these specific local contexts, but they are not immune to translocal forces.

Thus, the study of Buddhism and media or pop culture is a study of local, translocal, and global Buddhist culture – impossibly large. For our present purposes, then, I will focus primarily on instances of Buddhist pop culture and the criticisms it has raised both for cultural critics and for Buddhists themselves. Pop-cultural Buddhism can be understood to refer to how specific, identifiably Buddhist images or ideas are represented or expressed within the various media outlets described above.

Body Vows and dharmic expressions

As Meade Sperry's comment about the 'dharmic expressions' inherent in Buddhist tattoos suggests, tattooing, body piercing, and other acts of body art or body modification can be read as explicit acts of marking one's body and claiming a specific identity. While in the West tattoos were once associated with a criminal or deviant underclass or otherwise marginalized group, over the last few decades attitudes toward body art have changed radically. In the late 1990s, Tom Beaudoin suggested that for many members of Generation X, 'tattooing is the only way we have control over "branding" ourselves, instead of being name-branded to death' by American consumerist culture (Beaudoin 1998: 78). In the years since he made this claim, a wealth of social scientific research has been published (largely centered around surveys of college students) about attitudes toward tattooing. This research supports the notion that tattooing is no longer regarded as an act of deviancy or rebellion but rather as a means of self-expression, identity formation, complying with accepted or established modes of body adornment, and even becoming little more than another commodity to purchase within consumer culture, despite Beaudoin's assessment (Atkinson 2004, Foster and Hummel 2002).

Thus, as 'body vows' suggest, one way to read Buddhism in pop culture is as the particular expressions of individual Buddhists at a particular point in history. The Shinran anime, for example, is merely using a medium and art form peculiar to the modern age to tell the story of an important Buddhist figure and to attract potential followers. That Buddhists would be using cultural elements of their particular socio-historical location to express themselves is not particularly surprising; Buddhists have been expressing themselves in the arts and material culture of their day for millennia, from elaborate central Asian cave paintings to stoic Japanese rock gardens. It is reasonable to conjecture that individual Buddhist artists of times past were making their own 'dharmic expressions.' For example, early twentieth-century Japanese Buddhist artist Munakata Shikō used woodblock prints to depict Buddhist and Shintō deities, likening his prints to *saku*, the bundle

of sticks pilgrims carry with them to sacred Buddhist sites (Porcu 2007: 55). Twenty-first-century Americans may be read as merely substituting their bodies and tattoo ink for Munakata's woodblocks and paints.

However, culture is rarely uncontested, and some of the defining markers of Buddhist modernism – detraditionalization, demythologization, the psychologization of Buddhist cosmology (McMahan 2008) – complicate the diffusion of Buddhism in mass media and pop culture. As the website Digital Tibetan Buddhist Altar reminds us, not all Buddhists believe that pop-cultural representations of Buddhist images are harmless subjective markers of identity. Some, on the contrary, view such representations as evidence that the end of the world is at hand. Or, as Tessa Bartholomeusz writes in her critique of the appropriation of Buddhist ideas, especially tantric ones, in contemporary American culture,

> though it is impossible ... to know the inner state of motivation of these travelers, 'spiritual tourist' aptly describes some of us who never leave Tallahassee or Tacoma but become 'arm chair' wanderers to far off lands in search of gems to remedy our tedium, be it sexual or otherwise.
>
> *(Bartholomeusz 1998: 27)*

These concerns about pop-cultural Buddhism can best be seen as falling into one of two broad categories. On the one hand, there is the question of who is representing Buddhism and for what ends, and the concomitant issue of whether these representations are accurate or authentic representations of Buddhism, however that is defined. This question is linked to the history of Western colonialism *vis-à-vis* Buddhism and its native Asian locales. On the other hand, scholars (and some Buddhists) have raised questions about the corrosive effects of free market global capitalism that has at times co-opted Buddhist ideas, images, and icons not in the pursuit of Buddhist awakening but in the pursuit of private or corporate profit. Thus, while sometimes a Buddha image is just a Buddha image, at other times it represents a brazen act of cultural appropriation or 'neo-orientalism.' The remainder of this chapter will explore some of the more prevalent critiques against the representation of Buddhism in pop culture and the commodification of Buddhism.

Colonialism, Orientalism, and the Politics of Representation

To the extent that Buddhism has played such a vital role in the cultural history of a large part of the world that was on the receiving end of European colonialism, one must be attentive to the issues raised by post-colonial theorists, beginning, as always, with the work of Edward Said. Whereas his seminal work on the subject, *Orientalism*, was directed toward the project of European colonialism in the Near East and its effects

on Islam, the basic framework of his argument has subsequently been applied to the Far East, Hinduism, and Buddhism. According to Said, as European powers spread out over the Near and Far East and colonized those lands and people, there was a need to better understand and control their new subjects. This necessitated the 'systematic accumulation of human beings and territories,' which included not only actual physical space but language, arts, cultures, and the people who inhabited that space (Said 1978: 123). By accumulating more and more territory and culture, the colonizer was able to create an image or idea of 'the Orient' which he could subsequently better control and maintain.

One of the consequences of the colonialist and Orientalist project was the construction of religion itself as a category of culture and object of study. As Richard King aptly demonstrates in *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and 'the Mystic East'*, this project began with the assumption that Christian modes of religiosity and institutional structure were normative and the subsequent projection of these norms onto the colonial cultures under European control. Thus, while there was a vast complex of beliefs and practices revolving around Vedic and Bhramanical texts and rituals, there was no institutionally organized religion known as 'Hinduism' until the British gained control over the Indian subcontinent and labeled this collection of related religious activities as such. 'Buddhism' was constructed similarly, and early European researchers ascribed normative Christian modes of religiosity to the Buddhist tradition. Thus, Siddhartha Gautama was labeled the 'Hindu Martin Luther,' an Indian reformer protesting against the staid, ritualistic and caste-based Hindu religious system of the day.

An illustrative example of the Orientalist project and the Western representation of 'the Orient' can be found in Rudyard Kipling's 1901 novel *Kim*. The story, set in colonial British India, opens with the young English protagonist sitting on a cannon and looking at the Lahore Museum in what is now Pakistan. He befriends a young Tibetan lama on pilgrimage, and they enter the museum, which the locals call 'The Wonder House.' Inside, they are treated to a dazzling array of artifacts 'saved' by the British colonizers from decay, artifacts that are at once sacred religious objects and now lifeless, sterile museum pieces. In his reading of *Kim*, Stanley Abe notes that the Wonder House 'collects fragments of whole works, elides their original context, and recasts the art in the organizational structure of the Western archival institution, the museum' (Abe 1995: 65). It is the recasting of the art that is the central concern here. The Wonder House functions to redefine the nature and purpose of religious and cultural artifacts within a specifically Western context, i.e. the museum. In their original context, these artifacts had a specific religious or cultural system of meanings. Now enshrined in the museum, they are curios to be looked at and examined from a distance. That the museum is located in the Indian subcontinent means that it is redefining Indian culture not only for the colonizer but also for the colonized.

> In the idealized world of the Wonder House, Buddhist images are by definition alien and different, yet under certain circumstances, that is, through appropriate interpretative and disciplinary techniques, they are totally knowable. The Curator, in possession of the material remains of Buddhist art, the stacks of European books, and the training of an art historian, directs the process through which the incommensurable, Buddhist art, is transformed and rendered recuperable to the West as a version of the known. Such an appropriation is only possible, however, through the meticulous control and, when necessary, exclusion of the native presence, their history and their voice, from the discourse of art history.
>
> *(Abe 1995: 68)*

The process of Orientalizing the Asian other and its religious traditions and cultures is one in which the other is recast in terms knowable to the Western sympathizer, i.e. in Western terms. This recasting happens piecemeal; bits of culture are stripped from their original contexts, at times without the consent of those who originally created the culture, and recast in terms that serve to reinforce certain stereotypes or representations of the other. Thus the Orientalist project views 'Buddhism' as a valued object of study or appreciation, while Buddhists themselves are but the corrupted heirs of a once pure and undefiled tradition.

Bartholomeusz has used a postcolonial critique to expose what she dubs 'neo-orientalism' within contemporary US mass media. She suggests that representations of Buddhism and other Asian religions reinforce preexisting Orientalist stereotypes about the Asian other. These stereotypes generally circulate around a passive, mystical, and highly sexualized Asian other which, curiously, can be used to save, inspire, or resuscitate Western culture. Thus, when the fashion magazine *Mademoiselle* describes Taoism as 'the way of sex,' the *Kama Sutra* as a manual for how 'randy bachelors' can 'pick up girls,' and the Buddhist tantras as 'a group of love books' composed at a time in Indian history when Buddhists 'came up with the nifty idea of worshiping female deities,' Bartholomeusz is understandably bothered. These representations suggest that the 'Oriental really, really enjoys sex. We thus should look to the Orient to reclaim or restore [Americans'] true sexuality.' Further, *Mademoiselle* 'has reinterpreted Eastern religions' modes of transcendence as having instrumental value, as vehicles of instant gratification' (Bartholomeusz 1998: 24).

That the Asian other is cast in the role of savior to the West raises an interesting question: even if the representation is incorrect, is it necessarily bad? Jane Naomi Iwamura looks at similar representations of the Asian other in Western media in her study, 'The oriental monk in American popular culture.' She examines the ways in which Asian 'masters' have been represented primarily in US film and television over the last century, focusing on such figures as Kwai Chang Caine from the television series *Kung Fu* and Mr Miyagi from the movie *The Karate Kid*. These and other characters

construct a narrative 'in which orientalist notions of Eastern spiritual heritages and Western disillusionment and desire converge' (Iwamura 2005: 27). This is a narrative in which a disillusioned, often social outcast and more often white, Westerner will seek outside the boundaries of normative US culture for salvation. In this search, he or she will come upon the 'oriental monk,' an often mystical (and sometimes magical) figure who offers a way of life or set of teachings to enable the Western seeker to overcome their current ills. We can see a parallel here to Bartholomeusz's thesis that the Asian other is represented as a savior for the West. And while the heroic and idealized figure of the oriental monk may appear laudatory, Iwamura points out that this figure is often

> portrayed as a desexualized male character who represents the last of his kind. Passing on his spiritual legacy to the West through a bridge figure represents his only hope for survival. Hence, this narrative implicitly argues that Asian religions are impotent within their racial context of origin.
>
> *(Iwamura 2005: 32)*

Thus we need to be careful in our representations of Buddhism (and Asian culture more generally) that we do not perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes. One such stereotype is the passive, or in Iwamura's language impotent, Asian other. A fuller picture of European colonialist projects and the construction of Buddhism as a modern religion, however, reveals that Buddhism was not the mere passive victim to the European politics of representation. As Judith Snodgrass and others have demonstrated, Japanese and Sinhala Buddhists deliberately and self-consciously constructed images of Buddhism in response to European colonialists. Japanese Zen provides one of the clearest examples. Whereas there were certainly European Orientalist figures such as Eugen Herrigel (whose *Zen in the Art of Japanese Archery* was a massive hit in mid-twentieth-century Europe) who were responsible for creating and promoting certain ideas about the 'Zen' of Japanese culture, the Japanese themselves were heavily involved in the promotion of a certain Zen ascetic to Western audiences. Turn of the twentieth-century thinkers such as D. T. Suzuki and Hisamatsu Shin'ichi constructed their own brand of Zen Buddhism characterized by a sense of Japanese uniqueness, superiority, and nationalism (Porcu 2007: 53). This brand of Zen would become extremely influential to US and European thinkers such as Houston Smith and Alan Watts, who would in turn influence generations of Western audiences.

All of which is to suggest that representations of the Asian other have often been constructed in complex dialogues between Occident and Orient. This is not to suggest that European colonialism does not bear any responsibility in the construction of stereotypical representations; but scholars have cautioned against casting Asian religions in the role of passive victim of these Western representations, which itself

plays into the stereotype of the passive Asian other.

The struggle to define Buddhism and Asian culture more generally has played itself out in contemporary mass media and pop culture in conversations over the authenticity or validity of such representations. And there are potential consequences to such representations, especially when viewed comparatively to the representations of other religions. In his aptly titled essay 'Why are Buddhists so nice?', American religions scholar Thomas Tweed does just this by examining media representations of Buddhists and Muslims in US media. Tweed suggests that Buddhism is often represented by the figure of the solitary monk engaged in seated meditation, a representation that does not fully capture the religious life of most Buddhists across the world or over its history. Nevertheless, this image is one that projects an individualistic, passive sensibility that may help to account for the widespread acceptance of Buddhism and Buddhist ideas within US culture. Islam, on the contrary, is often represented by masses of people performing rituals such as the circumambulation of the *ka'ba* and, more recently and regrettably, terrorist attacks, all of which is clearly antithetical to the supposed 'American way of life.' While Tweed, here, refrains from drawing any hard conclusions, his comments are suggestive of how media representations can affect how differing religious traditions are better able to gain acceptance within mainstream US culture.

Capitalism and the commodification of Buddhism

The second major concern regarding the representation of Buddhism in pop culture or the media revolves around a critique of global capitalism and commercialism. It is clear that Buddhism is, in many respects, big business. In his study of the market for Zen-styled meditation cushions (*zafu*), 'Americans need something to sit on,' Douglas Padgett surveyed a wide range of *zafu* suppliers who, during the 1990s, experienced unprecedented growth. One company reported an estimated $250,000 in sales in 1980 and twice that 15 years later (Padgett 2000: 68). And it is worth pointing out that the suppliers of meditation cushions and other Buddhist ritual objects are often themselves Buddhists or associated with Buddhist institutions or Dharma centers. The business of selling such accouterment is a means of economic sustainability for some Buddhist organizations, making it clear, then, that Buddhists themselves are exploiting global capitalist networks. But it is also clear, as a quick perusal of The Worst Horse demonstrates, that it is not just Buddhists and Buddhist institutions that are buying and selling Buddhist objects.

Dharma Burgers permeate the marketplace. At The Worst Horse one can find copious examples of Zen products, countless images of meditating figures offering products as varied as actual meditation retreats to financial planning services, and a steady stream of Buddhas-as-luck-charms, relaxed and happy Buddhas in the face of

adversity, New Age and counter-cultural Buddhas, and meditating Buddhists selling credit cards, bottled water, energy drinks, and 'male enhancement' products. At the local bookstore, as Shōji Yamada notes in his *Shots in the Dark*, ever since Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery* and Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* there seems to be a never-ending supply of 'Zen in/and the Art of' books on the market, all promising a better, more Zen-like experience while writing or playing golf, in business management and relationships, and even while surfing the Internet (Yamada 2009: 10–18). And none of this includes the market in various Buddha statues and figures, whether for your car's dashboard or in the shape of pudding molds (see image 16.2).

While one could make the argument that the sum total of these products creates and perpetuates their own representations of Buddhism, and thus we can analyze them in the same anti-Orientalist vein as above, other scholars have put more emphasis on how such projects play into and reinforce the dominant capitalist market system. Jeremy Carrette and Richard King have been the strongest voices in this arena, claiming that New Age, self-help philosophy and contemporary consumer culture represent a privatized 'spirituality of the self.' Buddhism and other Asian religions, on the contrary, can be read as

> profound critiques of consumerism and a 'spirituality of the self' rather than an endorsement of them. Much of the contemporary literature of 'spirituality,' rather than picking up the richness and complexity of Asian wisdom traditions, privatizes them for a western society that is oriented toward the individual as *consumer* and society as *market*
>
> *(Carrette and King 2005: 122)*

If Buddhism is understood to be fully compatible with the capitalist market, if it is allowed to be commodified and used to suit the needs and profit margins of corporate interests, it fails to serve as a critique of consumer culture. Carrette and King's thesis suggests that if Buddhism were allowed to speak for itself, it would offer up a profound critique of free market capitalism that is dependent upon society's insatiable desire for ever more *stuff*.

It should be noted here that this concern about the commodification of Buddhism is not limited to the North American sphere. Cristina Rocha's study *Zen in Brazil* includes an analysis of how Buddhism is being represented in Brazilian mass media and pop culture. Among several parallel developments is the promotion of a 'Zen aesthetic,' especially amongst a highly educated, elite class of Brazilians. In her research, Rocha discovers that there is very little concern among this group of Buddhists for anything like the 'engaged Buddhist' movement, which suggests a disconnect from, or even disregard for, the social and economic inequality in their country. Rather, the adoption of a 'Zen style' becomes a bourgeois marker of class, a marker that is sharply



Figure 16.2 Il Buddino pudding molds on display in a San Francisco gift shop

criticized by other Brazilian Buddhists who feel both the 'Zen style' and the increased media attention on Buddhism are an inauthentic expression of Buddhism. 'While on the one hand many feel this media frenzy is helping to spread the dharma, on the other hand there is a tendency to despise the hype as "fashionable nonsense," which hinders true Buddhism from flourishing' (Rocha 2006: 148).

Negotiating what is 'true' or authentic Buddhist practice with the demands of certain economic realities is similarly played out in Thailand. For centuries, there has been a rich tradition of the veneration of images and icons of the Buddha and Buddhist saints or *arhants* in Thai culture. These images are often placed on amulets that are then sanctified by monastics and worn by laypersons. Over the past century, as the role of Buddhist institutions has diminished in Thailand in the wake of rising secularism, there has been an explosion in the market for icons and amulets. Donald Swearer notes that there are a number of critical Buddhist voices in Thai society who decry the sale of icons and amulets as little more than magical ritualism at odds with proper Buddhist doctrine. And there are secular Thai voices who claim that Buddhist monks involved in the sale of such items are themselves exploiting Buddhism to make a profit (Swearer 2003: 18). However, it is also clear that the rise in iconism and the

sale of amulets is the result of broader, global economic shifts that have affected Thai culture on a number of levels. As Thailand has made a transition to a modern, secular state, the financial support and prestige once given to Thai monastics by the government and the people has waned. It may be that the sale of icons and amulets is simply a survival strategy.

The example of the Jamba Juice Enlightened Smoothie at the start of this chapter further sullies the waters. Here, an American corporation with little interest in propagating Buddhism has co-opted Buddhist imagery (and an entire art form) for the explicit purpose of selling more of its product. This, it would seem, plays well into Carrette and King's as well as Rocha's informant's concerns about commodification and inauthentic representations of Buddhism. However, it is important to note that the artwork for this ad campaign was produced by a Tibetan Buddhist artist who was, for whatever reasons, complicit in the co-optation of his religious and cultural heritage. How would such critiques of Buddhist commodification and appropriation contend with cases where Buddhists themselves are doing the commodifying?

Lastly, we must be attentive to the fact that Carrette and King's reading of Buddhism as a critique of the 'spirituality of the self' and, by extension, consumer culture, is but one way among many to read Buddhist doctrine and history. As they point out, New Age spirituality ignores the richness and complexity of Asian religious traditions; Buddhism-as-capitalist critique would be just as simplistic, ignoring the complex relationship Buddhists have had with money. While there is within Buddhist ideology a view against material gain and attachment, monks have historically owned property, charged patrons for elaborate esoteric rituals in protection of the state, and, at present, sold meditation cushions on the global market.

Conclusion

While Buddhism or Buddhist imagery in the form of 'Dharma burgers' have permeated the global marketplace and media outlets, what are harmless personal 'dharmic expressions' to some are deeply offensive to others. We have seen that there are two broad critiques of pop-cultural Buddhism: either such representations are stereotypical (mis)representations of Buddhists and Asian culture; or the misuse of Buddhist iconography for capitalist purposes runs counter to Buddhism's ideals of non-attachment. Underlying both these concerns is the question of authenticity. What constitutes an authentic dharmic expression? Who speaks for Buddhism and for what ends? While some of Rocha's informants decried 'Zen style' as 'fashionable nonsense,' does this mean that a Zen temple that sells meditation cushions to support itself is no longer representative of 'true Buddhism'? Whereas Jamba Juice may have no vested interest in promoting the Buddha's Dharma, does employing a traditionally

trained Tibetan artist in their advertising campaign make their fruit juice-smoothie-cum-*thangka* paintings somehow authentically 'Buddhist'?

The question of authenticity then remains a vital one for Buddhist communities as they negotiate their place within global media networks. This represents a final lens through which the researcher may approach this subject: how do individual Buddhists understand the tension between tradition and modernity? Are all such forays into capitalism antithetical to the Buddha's Dharma? Or do they represent creative solutions to increasing secularism in modern societies? Regardless of how one answers such questions, it would seem that Dharma Burgers are endless, a marker of the myriad ways that Buddhism is interacting with the modern world.

Summary

- Buddhist imagery, ideas, and texts are increasingly visible within mass media and popular culture, at times for the explicit purpose of spreading Buddhism and at others for the purpose of selling commodities.
- Given that 'media' and 'pop culture' are necessarily broad and generalized terms, studies of this phenomenon need to be attentive to both specific locations and global cultural and communication networks.
- Buddhist institutions may exploit global capitalist markets either to spread the Buddha's teachings or as a strategy for financial survival.
- Individual Buddhists often employ pop-cultural mediums as a means of self-expression or identity formation.
- The Western representation of Eastern religious traditions has a historical connection to colonialism and the Orientalist project that may be insensitive to contemporary practicing Buddhists.
- Critics of pop-cultural Buddhism specifically and global capitalism more generally believe that the commodification of Buddhism is at odds with Buddhism's doctrines of non-attachment and no-self.
- Pop-cultural Buddhism and media representations raise questions about what is or is not authentically 'Buddhist.'

Discussion points

- How does Buddhism as a religion fit into Arjun Appadurai's five 'scapes' of transnational culture? Is Buddhism limited to one 'scape' or is it related to more than one? In what ways?
- How does the Orientalist project redefine or recast the 'orient'?
- How might media representations of particular religions or Buddhism affect how that religion is accepted into or rejected by mainstream culture?

- How might media representations of Buddhism be authentic? How might they be commodified and inauthentic?
- What is an 'authentic' representation of Buddhism?

Further reading

Carrette, J. and King, R. (2005) *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Carrette and King lay out a convincing critique of consumer and New Age culture's commodification of Asian 'wisdom traditions.'

Forbes, B. D. and Mahan, J. H. (2005) *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

A good textbook of essays that explore pop culture and religion in American culture. While most essays do not deal with Buddhism specifically, many can be used as good methodological examples or starting points.

Iwamura, J. (2010) *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Based on her dissertation research, Iwamura explores how media and pop-cultural representations perpetuate Orientalism.

King, R. (1999) *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and 'the Mystic East*,' New York, NY: Routledge.

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